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COMMONWEAL

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CORRESPONDENCE

Marching for choice

Brooklyn, N.Y.

To the Editors: It is very sobering, as you say ["The Longer March," May 5] to consider that more than 300,000 people would go to Washington to keep abortion legal and medically safe, and even more sobering that I would be one of them (Catholic mother and grandmother that I am). Reading your editorial helped me to articulate just exactly why I went. I saw the threat of making abortion illegal and unsafe as a setback for the justice and freedom for families that the editorial calls for at the end. I went for the many women who could not go. I went because I feel one cannot make a truly moral decision unless there is a choice. Otherwise it is not a decision but a victimization. I went because until we have the space and quiet to hear each other, which to me means when abortion is available as a medical procedure, legal and safe, we cannot begin to reach a moral consensus with ethical distinctions.

My experience of the eighteen hours going and coming from Washington and being there with many more than the reported 300,000 was that there was no proselytizing, no ranting and raving to convince. There were women of all ages, and I felt that almost every woman there represented an individual position, the bottom line of which is that women should be free to make a safe and legal decision.

An image stays in my mind (from one of those nature programs): a trapped animal, choosing to chew off its leg as the only escape from captivity and/or death. Abortion is a form of violence to one's own body and its potential. But as long as there are situations where a pregnancy could wreak greater violence on one or more persons, abortion can be seen as a lesser degree of violence and a defensible option.

Supporting the march does not cancel out any efforts I've made to fight for other human rights, as the editorial suggests. The abortion issue took precedence because it is in immediate danger. My companions for the day and night included a woman rebuilding condemned housing in the Bronx for a cooperative of poor families; one who spends a good deal of time and anguish caring for AIDS victims; and another committed to teaching minority children—clearly not one-issue women, and not all comfortable with abortion-on-demand, but in agreement on the threat to women's lives if abortion is made illegal again. It seems to me we were connected more than ever with issues of justice and poverty, and those issues don't always march hand in hand.

Thanks for keeping the issue in public discussion. We need every opportunity for reasoned exchange. JOAN SEXTON

The lay magisterium

Minneapolis, Minn.

To the Editors: Grounded. Real. Another deep sigh of gratitude to *Commonweal* for the series and article by Sandra H. Johnson [April 7], "The Laity and the Life of Faith."

You must know how healing it is to hear the truth and faith bestowed. A magisterium with the integrity of experience, the honesty of pain; as ordinary as life, as extraordinary as God.

How we as a church need this gift of the laity. A powerful ministry of the Word that helps compensate for our deprivation of the lay and feminine voice from the pulpit. JAMES A. EGAN, S.J.

Paul VI was right

One year ago (July 15, 1988), *Commonweal* published an editorial noting the twentieth anniversary of the publication of *Humanae vitae*. We received many letters and published several (September 23, 1988). In February 1989, we received a letter from Dr. Evelyn Billings who, along with her husband Dr. John Billings, is a proponent of the Billings Ovulation Method and of natural family planning. Our limited space and the press of other work prevented the editors from publishing and replying to Dr. Billings's letter until now—as it happens one year following the original editorial. Our apologies for the delay. THE EDITORS

East Melbourne
Victoria, Australia

To the Editors: Last year *Commonweal* commemorated the twentieth anniversary of *Humanae vitae* with an editorial ("Anniversary Waltz") and an article ("Sex: How Odd of God") that questioned both the effect and the wisdom of that encyclical. Two months later the editors returned to the subject in a reply to correspondence. Living at some distance, I did not become aware of the *Commonweal* discussion until some time later. I would like to reply to it now, as a woman whose experience is shared by millions of users of the Billings Ovulation Method in 100 countries, many underdeveloped, with poor and illiterate people participating.

In the editorial the prediction was made

(Continued on page 410)

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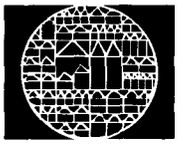

CONTENTS

Volume CXVI, Number 13

Correspondence	386
Editorials	387
Compromise or lose: *Robert E. White*	390
Solidarity's many faces: *Kenneth Moore*	391
As American as freeways: *David R. Carlin, Jr.*	392
Honk if you care: *Abigail McCarthy*	393
Never a question of easy grace: *Paul Baumann*	395
Meeting God in others: *Kathy Petersen Cecala*	400
Poetry: *Roy Shepard*	402
Screen: *Tom O'Brien*	402

BOOKS

Eric Gill: *Robert Gilliam*	404
A Strategy for Peace: *Jean Bethke Elshtain*	406
The Russia House: *Barbara A. Bannon*	407
Maternal Thinking: *Elisabeth Young-Bruehl*	408

STAFF

Editor: Margaret O'Brien Steinfels
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Movies: Tom O'Brien
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Intern: Elizabeth Leibold McCloskey
Staff: Harriette Balsky, Lisa Yancey, John A. Black
Advertising Manager: Ruth E. Taylor
Publisher: Edward S. Skillin

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Birmingham firehouse

From the Birmingham jail to the Birmingham firehouse could be the subtitle of a yet-to-be written history charting the rise and fall of the struggle for racial equality in the United States. Birmingham, Alabama: the home of Bull Connor, the police chief who set dogs loose on peaceful civil rights demonstrators; Birmingham, Alabama: the site in 1963 of lunch counter sit-ins, picketing, and protest marches against segregation; from its jailhouse Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote "Letter from Birmingham Jail," affirming his commitment to nonviolence and integration between blacks and whites.

Birmingham, Alabama: in 1981, after seven years of litigation, the city government signed a consent decree pledging to hire and promote blacks in the municipal fire department until their numbers approximated their proportion in the civilian labor force. The Justice Department joined in the decree, which was approved by the federal court. Now, eight years later, white firemen have persuaded a majority of the Supreme Court that they should be allowed to bring suit against the city of Birmingham because the consent decree discriminated against them. In essence, the Court has ruled in *Martin* v. *Wilks* that affirmative action agreements, even those approved by the courts, are subject to challenges from those who subsequently charge discrimination. Chief Justice William Rehnquist argued that consent decrees were binding only on the original parties; in dissent, Justice John Paul Stevens said the decision would subject efforts to remedy past discrimination to a "never-ending stream of litigation and potential liability."

Lieutenant Charles Bush, head of the Birmingham firefighters' union that brought the suit, argues, "we would be the last people to say that there wasn't ever discrimination in Birmingham....But we aren't the people who did it. We have to have a system that stresses more than numbers and race. Qualifications have to be part of it" (*New York Times*, June 14, 1989). The city of Birmingham is 55 percent black. Its 650-member fire department now has 160 black firefighters, 2 of whom have reached the rank of chief.

Lieutenant Carl Cook, president of the Black Firefighters Association, contests two of his counterpart's assumptions. First, Birmingham's black firemen are qualified: there has been no significant increase in lives or property lost to fire since the affirmative action program went into effect. Second, "when I hear white firemen use terms such as qualified and fairness in criticizing affirmative action, I just have to laugh, because those terms don't apply to the bureaucracy that runs the department and from which they benefit. Merit has never been the main thing in this department."

That cynical, but credible, reading of Birmingham's fire department, and for that matter, other city bureaucracies around the country, applies as well to significant numbers of public utilities, private companies, and corporations. Over the past decade-and-a-half, neoconservatives have argued that whatever short-term advan-

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"I'm just as tired as you are—maybe more!"

tage there may be in monitored attempts to redress past discrimination, the long-term consequences will be to further stigmatize their beneficiaries by labeling them second-rate and even "unqualified" for the positions they have reached. Even worse, they claim, the existence of such programs may "tar" members of the group who have "made it on their own." The argument concludes: better that blacks, women, and others who have suffered discrimination compete in the meritocratic market like everyone else. In the end, everyone will be better off without affirmative action programs; members of minority groups and society as a whole will enjoy the fruits of their success and the benefit of their "real" skills.

It's an argument worth considering if for no other reason than to observe how neatly it skips over the point that Lieutenant Cook makes: in exactly what proportion does merit enter into the always subtle and often highly personal calculations that go into hiring and promotion?

One of the major achievements of affirmative action agreements has been to help blacks make up not for lack of qualifications but for past discrimination and the always unacknowledged role that "family" and "the old boys' network" play in securing jobs and promotions for friends, children, nieces and nephews, the unemployed neighbor down the street. Do unqualified or marginally qualified people get hired and promoted as the result of affirmative action? No doubt they do. Just as unqualified and marginally qualified people get hired in the "meritocratic" world. In both cases it is unfortunate—unless of course, as sometimes happens, the "qualifications" are inflated beyond the real skills required to perform a particular job.

The question of qualifications, on which so many white male workers rest both their grievance at being passed over for newly hired or promoted minorities and their appeal to fairness, fails to acknowledge that their present dominance in many kinds of jobs rests upon past discrimination. Birmingham's 490 white firemen may not discriminate, but their predecessors in the Birmingham fire department and elsewhere did; whites everywhere continue to benefit from past discrimination while blacks continue to suffer from it. The effort to redress the balance may seem to discriminate against today's white workers, but are they actually worse off with goal-limited affirmative action plans than they would have been had their jobs been open to blacks from the beginning?

Efforts to bridge the great racial fault line in our national history depart from a color-blind ideal. Even at their most successful, affirmative action agreements can only be a rough gauge of fairness. It is this rough gauge that the Supreme Court seems to be withdrawing. *Martin* v. *Wilks* does not overturn the Birmingham consent decree and an out-of-court settlement between the city and white fireman may resolve their complaints. Perhaps the goals originally set will be honored. Legislative remedies have been promised by members of Congress, but in the present atmosphere enacting civil right legislation may prove hard going. Justice Stevens's prediction that the decision would seem to permit interminable legal action against such consent decrees is ominous; the net effect being finally to discourage blacks and civil rights organizations from exhausting their resources by defending them.

The Court's decision in this and other recent civil rights cases marks a retreat from its role as the nation's conscience. This is lamentable. So lamentable that in weighing candidates for coming appointments to the Supreme Court, the Bush administration and Congress ought to consider whether the Reagan counter-revolution has not swung the pendulum further than is tolerable in a society that still has so much of its racist past to redeem—and which today more than ever bears the cost of despair and frustration born from that past.

THE NATION'S CLOSETS

In his first day in office as the new speaker of the House of Representatives, Thomas Foley (D-Wash.) demonstrated that he is a large man who seldom raises his voice. In response to a Republican National Committee memorandum comparing Mr. Foley's record to that of Barney Frank (D-Mass.)—a liberal and a homosexual—and implying that Mr. Foley is a closet homosexual, the new speaker responded that he was not concerned about such partisan attacks on himself, but that he was intent on "restoring the House to a measure of cooperation and conciliation between the two parties." Those are high-minded and important sentiments, expressed none too soon. We hope they will be emulated on both sides of the House aisle. Unfortunately, however, Speaker Foley's remarks stopped before they should have.

Last year in the U.S. there were more than 7,200 reported incidents of violence and harassment against homosexuals, ranging from verbal abuse to homicide. Each year since such

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numbers have been compiled, they have jumped, more than tripling since 1985. The Republican National Committee's memo deserves to be included in next year's list.

Outside Lee Atwater, who initially defended the memorandum (Atwater is chairman of the Committee, the architect of George Bush's hardball 1988 presidential campaign, and the man who made Willie Horton a household word), the outcry on behalf of Speaker Foley was immediate and loud. President Bush called the memo "disgusting"; Robert Dole (R-Kans.) appraised it as "garbage"; and White House Chief of Staff John Sununu said it was inappropriate and unfair, its innuendo "wrong."

True enough. But there was/is another victim and another constituency far more seriously maligned by the Committee's smear than Mr. Foley. We are referring, of course, to Congressman Frank and to homosexuals in general.

The memo and the response it produced in Mr. Foley's defense but failed to produce on Mr. Frank's behalf, demonstrate how acceptable homosexual bashing remains in this country. Mr. Foley was defended, as in truth he should have been. Mr. Frank, on the other hand, was vilified, his name used as casually and malignly as had been Willie Horton's in last year's campaign.

The pervasive prejudice against homosexuals is not often or openly spoken of by governmental leaders in this country, even though the effects of that prejudice are evident in each year's statistics. By missing a chance to address such a widespread and brutal prejudice when it reared its head so clearly in the Foley-Frank case, leaders of both parties failed their responsibility. Their silence, and ours, only reinforces that prejudice more deeply and damagingly.

ET CETERA

HOW SOLID SOLIDARITY? The remarkable victory of Solidarity candidates in the June 4 Polish elections will expose the stresses and strains within its ranks. Diverse political tendencies are discussed by Kenneth Moore on page 391 of this issue. But there are other religious and cultural divisions that will take their toll of a coalition long held together by a common enemy—the government. A Polish visitor to *Commonweal*'s office prior to the election predicted that abortion would emerge as one such issue. Poland's liberal 1956 law allows abortion for economic or medical reasons. In a country where contraceptive pills and devices are scarce, abortion has become the standard means of family planning, and half of all pregnancies end in abortion. Our visitor observed that absent previous political debate or serious church discussion of public policy on contraception or abortion, there was likely to be a muddled and acrimonious political controversy at some future point.

Hardly was our visitor out the door when a news report from Poland echoed those predictions (*New York Times*, May 29, 1989). Just prior to the June 4 election parliament took up a bill to revoke the 1956 law and to impose penalties on those who perform abortions as well as on women who have them. The bill, said to have been written by lawyers for the Polish Bishops' Conference, was supported by some seventy members of the pre-election parliament who identify themselves as part of Solidarity's conservative wing. But many of them—Catholic politicians and Christian Democrats—were refused places on the Solidarity ballot for their cooperation with the Communist government during Solidarity's illegal days. Interestingly, in an interview prior to the election, Cardinal Jozef Glemp said: "In this question [of abortion] we would not like to stir society's passions....We think an honest and more thorough analysis of the matter is necessary for all." The cardinal and Lech Walesa also issued a joint statement urging that abortion be kept out of the election campaign, as apparently it was.

BISHOPS LOVE THEOLOGIANS The keynote speaker, Archbishop John L. May, at the Catholic Theological Society meeting in St. Louis (June 7-10) addressed relations between bishops and theologians in an unusually forthright manner: "I think that the church in the United States suffers from too many anxious, warning voices that would divide the bishops against theologians." This "climate of suspicion so harmful to the church," the archbishop went on, "is fed by casual remarks about the fidelity of others, by ungrounded accusations, and by warnings whose urgency is sometimes, perhaps often, in inverse proportion to their authors' command of hard facts." In contrast to the atmosphere of fear and suspicion engendered by such accusations, he pointed to the positive collaboration of bishops and theologians on diocesan boards as well as at the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, which included cooperative work on major pastoral letters on the economy and on war and peace, as well as on the nine-year effort to develop a set of guidelines for resolving doctrinal disputes between bishops and theologians. (In fact, the bishops adopted these guidelines at their semi-annual meeting [June 16-19] where Archbishop Oscar H. Lipscom, chairman of the drafting committee, remarked, "I would like to think that the Curran affair might have had a different outcome if such a process had been in place....")

In his address, Archbishop May also expressed reservations about an article in *Commonweal* ("Audition for Tragedy," April 21) which said that Vatican criticisms of U.S. theologians went unanswered during the archbishops' meeting with the pope and curial officials this past March. According to Archbishop May, this silence did not represent, as the article claimed, a vote of no-confidence in the scholarship of theologians, but rather: "I suspect that the reason that no one pursued this issue in defense of the theologians in the United States is that the soundness of our relationship with you [theologians] seemed so obvious, so taken for granted, so unquestionable among us."

Among other matters, the theologians also confirmed at their annual meeting the statement of John P. Boyle, the president of the CTSA, on the Washington, D.C. court decision in the case of Charles Curran. It read in part: "Since the process against Father Curran began at The Catholic University, the CTSA has

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repeatedly stated its conviction that Father Curran is a Catholic theologian esteemed by his professional colleagues. It does so again today. The society also expresses its respect for the many theologians and other scholars who continue their work in the School of Religious Studies at The Catholic University of America in this difficult period."

REPORT ON EL SALVADOR

COMPROMISE OR LOSE

SETTLING FOR A SETTLEMENT

Seldom is foreign policy made. First it accumulates; then all too often disintegrates. United States policy toward Central America had moved into the advanced stages of decomposition by the time President George Bush entered the White House this last January.

In concert with Congress and the democratic leaders of Latin America, the new administration has moved to work out political solutions to the crises in Nicaragua and Panama. Even the hawkish ex-Assistant Secretary of State Elliot Abrams has expressed qualified approval. Blessed are the distant for they shall gain perspective.

It is in El Salvador, however, that the Bush administration's commitment to negotiation and compromise will meet its toughest test. The near-total breakdown of the centrist, ruling Christian Democratic party has dealt another shock to a policy that already lacked both coherence and direction. Yet the news is not all bad. The collapse of the center has had the unlooked-for effect of driving the extremist movements toward moderation. Both the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) and the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (the FMLN), now profess to believe in negotiation as the preferred means to end the decade-old civil war. In a recent speech, Secretary of State James Baker stated his support for dialogue "between the government of El Salvador and the Marxist guerrillas to end the conflict...."

The one indisputable result of the more than $4 billion of overt and covert assistance we have thrown at the Salvadoran conflict has been the emergence of the most capable, resilient, and resourceful guerrilla movement the Western hemisphere has ever seen. The revolutionaries have not only survived the high-tech war directed by the U.S., they have extended their military power and political cadres into every province of the country.

Time works against the government. The revolutionaries and the rich collaborate in the destruction of the economic base of the country. The guerrillas blow up bridges and burn warehouses while the wealthy export into their foreign bank accounts every dollar of hard currency they can lay their hands on. Although El Salvador has the most highly trained, best equipped military force in the region, morale is low and confidence eroding. High ranking officers admit privately that the war is unwinnable.

Last month, Alfredo Cristiani took the oath as president of El Salvador. Cristiani won the election under the banner of ARENA, an extreme right-wing party which represents the interests of the industrialists and large landowners. Yet, in his visit to this country, Cristiani came across as a decent, responsible leader committed to human rights and to a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Cristiani, however, may find little tolerance inside his own party for moderation and conciliation. Ex-Major Roberto D'Aubuisson founded ARENA in the image of fascism. In an attempt to justify death squads during the early days of the civil war, D'Aubuisson told European reporters, "You Germans were very intelligent; you realized the Jews were responsible for the spread of communism and you began to kill them." The sick minds that seek a final solution through military massacres and death squads still wield great power. The ARENA campaign chant tells the story: "Cristiani to the presidency, D'Aubuisson to power."

ARENA won the election because President José Napoleon Duarte and his ruling centrist Christian Democratic party simply collapsed under the conflicting pressures of attempting to govern a country torn apart by war. In the eyes of the Salvadoran voters, Duarte had abandoned nationalist imperatives and had adopted a policy of genuflection toward the United States. The party had as its broad base of support, the professional class, small businessmen, landholding peasants, and the working poor.

An experienced, bold, and instinctive politician, President Duarte was the one leader in the country with the skill and credentials to bridge the gap between the center and the left; Duarte was elected in 1984 on a platform calling for dialogue and reconciliation with the revolutionary forces. The refusal of the Reagan administration to back realistic negotiations turned Duarte from a president with an overwhelming mandate to end the war, into a hapless figure whose chief role was to lobby Congress for ever-increasing military assistance.

If there is a leftover cue card in the oval office desk, President Bush might do well to jot down this fundamental fact: Any Salvadoran leader who tries to impose a military solution on the country will weaken not only his party, but the forces that party represents. Unless the Bush administration turns away from the Reagan emphasis on military victory, the failure of the centrist Christian Democrats will be followed by the progressive weakening of the right-wing ARENA party, leaving the military of El Salvador bereft of any plausible political partner. With these two political movements disabled the revolutionaries would become the strongest organized political force in the country.

Just before leaving office, Secretary of State George Shultz set out the reasons why he believed the U. S. must continue to assist the government of El Salvador in its struggle. Shultz's main points hit at the guerrillas' refusal "to test their support at the polls" and their insistence "on power-sharing in a transitional government formed outside the electoral process."

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In what appeared to be a direct response to United States concerns, the revolutionaries offered to participate in the electoral process and to abide by the outcome in exchange for a six-month postponement of the election. They also gave up any request for power-sharing as described by Shultz. The Bush administration was impressed enough with the proposals to declare them "serious and worthy of substantive consideration."

In April, a group of concerned American citizens held conversations in Mexico City with the Political-Diplomatic Commission of the revolutionary movement. The commission put in writing its readiness to negotiate a political solution to the conflict and its commitment "to the establishment of a pluralistic and democratic system in both the political and economic spheres."

The commitment of both President Cristiani and the revolutionaries to a political solution remains to be tested. The Bush administration should waste no time in encouraging the parties to move to the negotiating table. This may turn out to be a long and frustrating wrangle. Yet it will prove far more frustrating and expensive to continue to prop up a government that lacks the base to exercise effective power.

In the end, any settlement will require a willingness on the part of the U.S. to accept an outcome that reflects, to some degree, the balance of forces that exists. Such an arrangement will not satisfy those Americans of either the right or the left who seek military victory over the forces of evil. Yet a United States-backed compromise offers the only hope for El Salvador to find a framework for political peace and economic development.

ROBERT E. WHITE

Robert E. White, U.S. ambassador to El Salvador during the Carter administration, is president of the International Center for Development Policy in Washington, D.C.

REPORT FROM POLAND

SOLIDARITY'S MANY FACES

TO GOVERN IS TO CHOOSE

A great white banner with *Solidarnosc* spelled out in red hung from the upper levels of the Gdansk railway station. Billboards and posters throughout Warsaw, the smaller cities, and the countryside announced not only Solidarity's contention in the Polish election of June 1989, but proclaimed a new era of freedom for the nation. Only nine months prior to this campaign Solidarity had been illegal. In the eight years since its foundation many of its leaders had served prison terms for unlawful political activities. The election campaign brought forth not only Solidarity's banners, but as well the proliferation of new journals and newspapers and the

presentation of diverse political positions on radio and TV. The students of Warsaw University went on strike, and in marches and public meetings protested the government's refusal to officially recognize the Independent Student Union, the NZS. Their highly vocal protest was ignored by most; in particular the police.

As the campaign progressed it became increasingly clear that Solidarity would win. A week before the election Lech Walesa said that anything less than 70 percent of the seats in the newly formed Senate would be a disappointment. When the results came in, Solidarity had won 92 of the 100 seats in the Senate and was destined to win another 7 in the June 18 run-off. In the lower house, the *Sejm*, the government was assured 65 percent of the seats by an agreement with Solidarity. A candidate could be defeated only if more than 50 percent of the voters crossed out his or her name. A majority of the electorate expressed its rejection of the government by crossing off thirty-three of its candidates. One of these was the prime minister. This had not been anticipated in the pre-election planning and produced a constitutional crisis. Lech Walesa proposed a post-election roundtable to resolve the problem.

Though Solidarity won convincingly, it will not assume control of the government. Assumption of power would be the normal outcome of a similar victory in an election in the West, but it was agreed beforehand that this election would be no more than one step in the direction of parliamentary democracy. This had all been decided in roundtable negotiations which in their pre-election creation of the ground rules and postelection resolution of constitutional questions seemed almost to dwarf the election itself.

The roundtable negotiations were originally called for by the minister of the interior as a means of resolving the crisis created by Solidarity-initiated strikes in August 1988. Speaking for the government, Minister Czeslaw Kiszczak asked the then illegal Solidarity to "participate in talks at the roundtable." Walesa agreed, met with Kiszczak, and following the meeting called off the strikes. In the months that followed Walesa was invited to appear on national TV to debate the leader of the government-sponsored union. Walesa not only won convincingly but outlined Solidarity's case to a national audience. Shortly thereafter Walesa had a second meeting with Kiszczak and the two agreed to a roundtable discussion between Solidarity and the govern-

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ment commencing February 6, and lasting no more than six weeks. The roundtable actually went on for nine weeks, but out of the heated dialogue of the final three weeks the two sides produced a communiqué that laid down the format for government restructuring and national election procedures. The significance of the roundtable was expressed by Walesa who said at its conclusion, "the fact that with the authorities we can write today words that until recently would have been read only in underground periodicals inspires us with hope." The government minister at the joint appearance said, "Neither side has won. There is only one winner, the nation, our country."

According to the roundtable agreement, the Polish election of 1989, with an assured victory for the government party in the *Sejm*, was a necessary preliminary stage leading to totally free elections in 1993. Would the ruling Communist party relinquish power if defeated at that time? In a postelection interview with the London *Independent*, General Wojciech Jaruzelski implied that it would. He said, "it is logical that if you talk about free elections, one assumes any outcome is possible." In spite of Jaruzelski's noble words there are many contrary signs; it is doubtful that the Communist party of Poland would retreat to obscurity if defeated at the polls. Surely, they have a list of alternate scenarios; one of these is based on the great diversity of positions within Solidarity.

Solidarity is not a political party even though it participated as such in the election of 1989. It is better described as an integrating mechanism for the many factions that make up the opposition. By 1993 political parties will emerge. Among these will be a nationalist party asserting total Polish independence. The conservative movement, currently referred to as the neoliberal faction, will produce another. A third major party will be social democratic in philosophy, supporting a socialist economy, demilitarization, and a parliamentary system of government. With pollution a major national problem, a strong environmentalist constituency has emerged and a variation on the Green parties of Western Europe will likely appear by 1993. Solidarity's role in this more diverse political context will be quite different from what it is today.

Also of major consideration as Poland looks toward the elections of 1993 are the role of the church and the condition of the economy. In the 1989 election the church served as a patron. According to Bronislaw Geremek, a principal adviser to Lech Walesa, "The church was not only a patron of the roundtable, but in fact also one of its promoters and initiators." A Polish pope in dialogue with both Solidarity and the government will have much to say, although quietly, in the coming four years.

As for the economy, it is a disaster. Hyperinflation, a severe housing shortage, the rationing of meat, the use of the dollar rather than the *zloty* as the principal currency for major purchases are all signs of an economic order that is out of control. Cynics have observed that the reason the Communists have invited Solidarity into the government is to share the blame. An improving economy will do much to enhance the prospects for an orderly election in 1993. Should the economy get worse, unanticipated and unpopular measures will be called for and the party responsible will be held accountable.

Though the Polish nation is not only in flux, but in crisis, historians of the future will recall that in 1989 the most open and democratic election in Eastern Europe in more than forty years took place there. Many sides and factions including the Communist government, Solidarity, and the church contributed, and each will be remembered for what it did.

KENNETH MOORE

Kenneth Moore, professor of cultural anthropology at the University of Notre Dame, has recently returned from a visit to Poland. His published works include Those of the Street, The Catholic-Jews of Mallorca, Waymarks, *and a new edition of* The Revolt of the Masses *by José Ortega y Gasset.*

In keeping with *Commonweal's* usual summer schedule, only one issue is published each month during July and August. The next issue will be dated August 11.

OF SEVERAL MINDS David R. Carlin, Jr.

AS AMERICAN AS FREEWAYS

ABORTION'S ROOTS IN OUR CULTURE

Prolife critics of *Roe* v. *Wade* often compare that U.S. Supreme Court decision with the *Plessy* v. *Ferguson* decision made by the Court in 1896. *Plessy* enunciated the notorious doctrine of "separate but equal," thereby upholding the South's newly enacted Jim Crow laws by finding them to be not inconsistent with the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause.

Nearly sixty years later, in 1954, the Court reversed itself on *Plessy*. In *Brown* v. *Board of Education*, it destroyed the separate but equal rule by finding racially segregated schools to be "inherently unequal." This initiated, or rather accelerated, a process of enormous social and cultural change in race relations, a process not totally completed to this day, more than a third of a century later.

If the Court reversed itself on one colossal blunder, *Plessy*, there is no reason, say the critics, it should not reverse itself on *Roe*, another colossal blunder. Granted, such a reversal will entail considerable disruption. The battle over abortion laws will have to be fought in all fifty states; and in those states in which abor-

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tion is either prohibited or greatly restricted, individuals who had counted on abortion as a kind of sexual safety net will be compelled to alter their behavior so as to reduce the chances of undesired pregnancies. None of this, admit the critics, will be easy; neither was the dismantling of Jim Crow easy. But what's right is right, no matter the social or personal inconvenience. Justice must be done, even though America's current "dating" customs perish.

The critics are correct, I believe, when they say *Roe* v. *Wade* was a constitutionally poor decision. The Court had previously discovered an unwritten right of privacy to be present in the Bill of Rights' "penumbra" (whatever that is); and in *Roe* the Court so absolutized that shadowy (or rather, not quite so substantial as to be shadowy) right as to authorize the killing of a fetus without first determining whether the subject in question might not be a human being. And if the prolife critics have the better arguments legally, they have by far the better arguments philosophically. It is downright embarrassing, not to mention frustrating, to listen to otherwise intelligent prochoice advocates squirming and tap-dancing to avoid getting pinned down to a discussion on the cardinal question of whether the fetus is a person or not. Persons who normally pride themselves on their rationality abandon rational argument at this point and pretend that the most important question of all is too trivial to debate.

But the analogy of *Roe* with *Plessy* fails at one important point. When the Court reversed *Plessy* in 1954, it was in step with the long-term drift of public opinion; if it reverses *Roe*, it will be out of step.

When the Court reversed itself on the separate but equal doctrine, it ran into resistance, to be sure, from a formidable force—the most racially bigoted elements of the Southern white population. But pushing in the same direction as the Court were other forces which, in the long run, were likely to prove far more potent than white bigotry. Desegregation made sense economically in the South; for the region was bound to remain in a state of permanent backwardness so long as its black population was kept in a condition of ignorance and poverty and so long as its white political leadership was mindless enough or dishonest enough to relish the rhetoric of white supremacy. Desegregation made sense politically; for American liberalism, having accomplished its New Deal agenda and then having survived McCarthyism, was free for the first time to turn its full energy and attention to the race problem. And desegregation made sense geopolitically; for the United States was being hindered in its post-World War II attempt to provide leadership to a largely nonwhite world by the presence of racial segregation in its own back yard. George Wallace, Orville Faubus, and company might try to resist, but the tide of history was likely to prove too strong for them.

But as far as I can see, there is no historical tide sweeping the prolife party along to eventual victory. Just the opposite. Cultural values that support a right to abortion, indeed that virtually require such a right, so far from being in decline, are growing in strength.

Our society places great value on both individualism and on high levels of consumption. We want to be free to do as we please, and what we please to do is to spend a lot of money on houses, cars, clothing, furniture, vacations, etc. We also subscribe (formally at least, if not always in practice) to the doctrine of equality of the sexes; and we prefer late marriage in order that young people might complete their educations and begin careers before settling down. Now, any society of this sort will inevitably place great value on sexual freedom, which is a compendious symbol and instrument of these values. Yet widespread sexual freedom, even in a contraceptive age, will inevitably lead to a considerable number of undesired pregnancies—that is, to a considerable number of situations in which women, the great majority of them young women, will want to have abortions.

The right to abortion, in other words, is a corollary to our cultural system. Prohibit abortion and you throw a monkey wrench into the whole system. If abortion is not allowed, then the set of value premises from which abortion is derived as a practical conclusion—individualism, consumerism, gender equality, late marriage—has to be called into question.

But is our society prepared seriously to call these values into question? Of course not.

The right to abortion may be bad constitutional law and even worse moral philosophy, but by now, I fear, it is as American as our urban freeways. Considered as an abstract proposition, some interesting arguments against freeways can be developed; but these are not likely to lead in practice to the dismantling of our freeway systems. Neither are the many excellent and unrefuted arguments against abortion likely to lead to the dismantling of our abortion system. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS Abigail McCarthy

HONK IF YOU CARE

CHINA NEXT DOOR

Those of you who read this column regularly know how often I have inveighed against television because of one of its insidious effects—the tendency of its viewers to substitute the image for the reality. Imagine then my chagrin not long ago when I found that I myself had fallen into that trap—and fallen in connection with one of the most moving series of events in modern times.

Both the Chinese embassy and the building where I live in Washington look out on a small park. It is just large enough for a few benches, a bank of lavender azaleas, a bed of tulips, and one large magnolia tree surrounded by a small lawn. For the past month that park has been the center of protest for Chinese students in the United States and their sympathizers.

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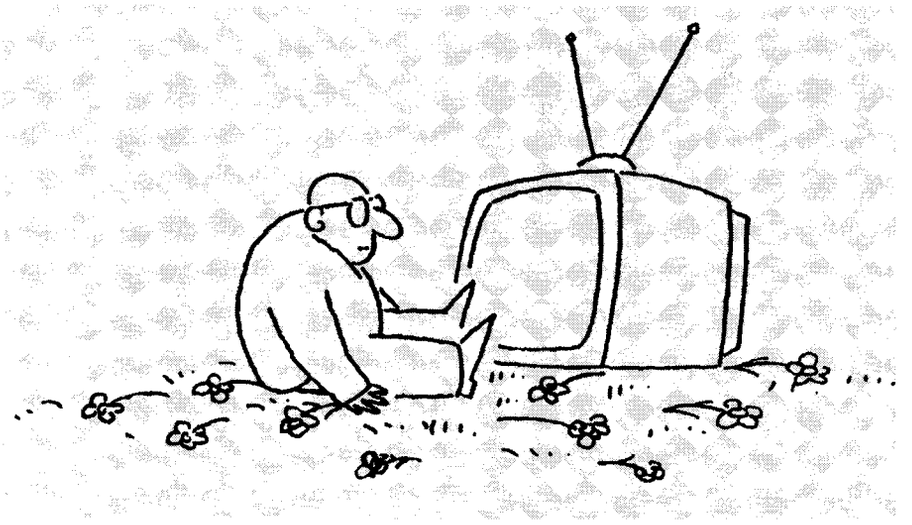
On May 20 they came from all over the country to march up the avenue and demonstrate before the embassy. They were for the most part their country's young elite—graduate students who were chosen and sent here to prepare for professions by the very government they were decrying. I had to leave town that day but I saw the vanguard arriving and lining up in an orderly fashion to register their names at a small table in front of the embassy. After they signed their names they strolled back in groups of two or three to the point where the march was to begin a mile or so away. If they had anything to fear they did not show it. My neighbors told me that the march and the demonstration that afternoon were large and impressive. The demonstrators were neat and polite and cleared away their signs and debris.

Some days later the Tibetans who had mingled with the Chinese for that first protest staged their own. For the past year a forlorn but steadfast one or two had been standing in the park in cold or heat facing the inbound traffic and holding "Free Tibet" banners. Now, because of the Chinese with whom they had made common cause, "the whole world was watching" and they seized the moment. As I came from parking my car I found the little park alive with a colorful assembly. Tall Buddhist monks in saffron robes moved through a mixed crowd of Tibetans in traditional costume and Americans, Chinese, and Tibetans in standard student dress. Prayer flags and banners fluttered in the hot afternoon wind. Chants followed speeches. I noted all this and I passed by.

It was not until I was settled into my air-conditioned living room and opening the new copy of *Time* that I realized what I had done. The worldwide movement cresting in Tiananmen Square was lapping at my doorstep and I was relying on the printed page and the upcoming TV evening news to connect me with it! Like so many others I seemed to prefer experience strained through a mechanical and form-ridden selection process to raw experience I could sort through on my own.

I promised myself that it would not happen again. When, the next week, the student protest resumed—Chinese students, or perhaps simply the students of the eighties, don't seem to skip tests and classes to demonstrate—I went out to mingle and to talk with them.



Like other observers I had wondered what exactly they and their models in China wanted. The waving signs called for "democracy" but clearly it wasn't the democracy of representative government as we think of it in the West. What they seemed to want was more personal freedom and more control over their own lives within the context of communism. They echoed Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty or give me death"—using the famous words like a slogan. But they quoted and praised Mao, and Gorbachev was their hero. When they broke into a song not immediately recognizable I asked a woman student what they were singing. "It is always the same song," she said, "the international song." The Internationale. Their exact goals did not become clearer as I talked with them. But other things did.

They felt an immense pride in their own unity and their own efforts to support the movement in China. They recited the number of schools from which they had come—the University of Pennsylvania, Ohio State, the University of Florida at Gainesville, Duke, the University of Cincinnati, and a host of smaller schools. They were in touch with relatives and friends at home. "My mother, my father, my uncles, they all went to the side of the road to stop the soldiers," said one.

It was just after Zhao, who seemed to be on their side, had been shunted aside by Deng and the signs indicated the coming repression. "Aren't you afraid of reprisals?" I asked. "Might they not take you out of school and order you back—send you far away into the countryside?" The answer was immensely practical. "There are too many of us. And, if they begin that, we can ask for political asylum."

But they *were* worried about the students in China. Even then they seemed to know that the government would inevitably react with force. In retrospect, now that we know how brutal the reaction has been, how murderous, they spoke of the possibility with a surprising and stoic acceptance. "Oh, they may stop it now," said one, "but not forever. A year, two, more, but we keep on. The people keep on."

As I write, the voices from the park are audible in the background. They are more impassioned now, more intense. I have been out again and I know they are pleading for our support, pleading to keep our attention, to keep the spotlight on their homeland. "Honk," the signs say, "honk if you care about your brothers and sisters in China." So far by day and night there has been a cacophony of response—for some reason sporadic by day, more sustained when night falls. The city is saying it cares.

Our attention will wane, of course, but theirs will not. What I learned from talking to those people outside, from touching their reality, is that they are like one being, a being with an almost frightening patience and a common will from which power must eventually flow. □

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NEVER A QUESTION OF EASY GRACE

THOMAS KENEALLY'S FANTASTICAL CREATURES

PAUL BAUMANN

What are we to make of a novelist whose frankly numinous attitude toward the womb is best likened to the Lord God's intercessions with Israel's long-suffering matriarchs? And Sarah laughed, you say. Perhaps. But both in salvation history and in the prodigious fiction of Australia's Thomas Keneally, the fantastical fruits of the womb invoke awe and due reverence before the power and mystery of creation. Nothing, Sarah was reminded, is impossible for the Lord. Keneally, though he might insist on a different vocabulary, brings a similar sense of possibility to the world. He even gives his human creatures hoofs.

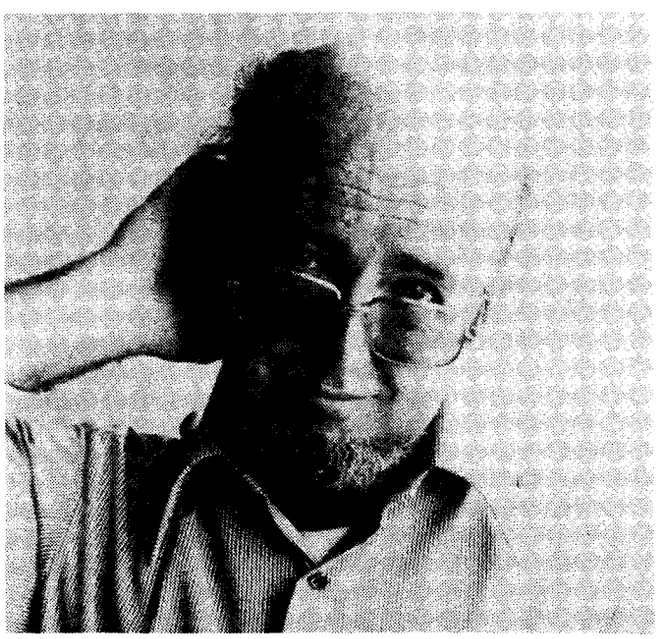
At fifty-four, this former seminarian—he demurred two weeks before ordination—has written nearly twenty novels. He is perhaps best known for *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, a historical novel about the clash of aboriginal and white cultures in nineteenth-century Australia, which was made into a movie. He was awarded Britain's Booker Prize in 1982 for *Schindler's List*, a novel based on the life of Oskar Schindler, a German industrialist deeply implicated in the Nazi war machine and Final Solution who yet became a "god of deliverance," saving more than a thousand Jewish concentration camp inmates.

The same author in his 1969 book, *The Survivor*, has staged the exhumation of a martyred explorer buried for forty years in the Antarctic ice. In *Blood Red, Sister Rose*, he vigorously reinvented Joan of Arc, giving her the earthy, egalitarian instincts of an "Australian country girl" and—or so he has said—the gutsy feminism of Germaine Greer. His ferocious vision of adolescence and the primal, immanent power of sex takes the form of a bizarre fable that is part Kafkaesque metamorphosis and part macabre situation comedy in *A Dutiful Daughter*.

Keneally is a brute of a novelist, determined to test his strength in a variety of forms and subjects. His fictive worlds range from Nazi concentration camps to eighteenth-century British penal colonies, from the exotic moonscape of a prelapsarian Australia to the leaden atmosphere and treacheries of a diocesan seminary, the setting for *Three Cheers for the Paraclete*. An assiduous craftsman, a subtle historian, Keneally renders with indelible detail the idiosyncratic texture of an epoch. The latrines of medieval castles and the autopsy techniques of an eighteenth-century military physician, along with a thousand other telling particulars, find a way into these novels.

But if Keneally has a visionary's appetite for the historical tableau, he never forsakes the novelist's conviction that human character and individual choice shape that history. These novels are enlivened by an eagerness to get at essentials and a wild prophetic sense of anger. Keneally has not been a novelist given much to the calculation of suburban manners, the conjurings of finance or realpolitik, the contrivances of power and status in modern mass cultures. His appetites are more basic, more enduring. Nor is he afraid to risk sentimentality. Keneally's novels place people in extreme circumstances, encouraging the full play of his often mythological themes.

In the four novels under principal consideration here, a whiff of sulfur hangs in the air. The "Tawny Prince," as the devil is called in *The Playmaker*, is an ineradicable presence. Scaffolds



PAUL BAUMANN *is a staff writer and movie critic for* The Day *in New London, Connecticut.*

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and other instruments of twisted human imagination preside over the landscapes. Blizzards, floods, the massed ferocity of modern war move against solitary, seemingly helpless human figures. In such vivid settings we get monsters of evil, such as Amon Goeth, the sadistic Nazi concentration camp commandant in *Schindler's List*. Or monsters of virtue, like the passionate but obtuse canonist and bishop-elect, Costello, for whom hurrahs are ironically solicited in *Three Cheers for the Paraclete*. Or plain monstrosities, like the proletarian and bewitched—the uddered and hoofed—Glovers in *A Dutiful Daughter*.

As an allegorist Keneally conjures up symbolic worlds. A desolate, primeval landscape—"a roaring darkness, a basic darkness, the type that breeds ghosts and visions, rituals for luck or salvation, religion itself"—is the backdrop for the masquerades and crimes perpetrated at Campbell's Reach in *A Dutiful Daughter*. In *The Playmaker*, an unexplored Australia, the very "other side of the moon," lends its own aura to the crude human drama taking shape on its shores. Even amid the rough justice and stark passions of that desperate "penal planet," the "word is made flesh" again, first in contriving the rudiments of social order, then in the miracles of playmaking and lovemaking. That incarnational imperative gives birth to a redeemed people. For Australia's patriarchs and matriarchs—and the novel uses the actual names from prison registers—had been reprieved from the gallows of London's infamous Newgate Prison.

Perhaps the most spectacular—certainly the most peculiar—expression of Keneally's ontological concerns is *A Dutiful Daughter*, a darkly comic and portentous little fable with a manic apocalyptic tone. Life is a blood sport in this Australian netherworld, not an intellectual puzzle. Knowledge is paid for with one's damnable flesh, as it is throughout Keneally's work.

The monstrous and pathetic Glover (G-lover?) clan and its mad family romance is played out on the "least significant continent, the arsehole of the earth." It's a fable that might have been teased out of Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. The limits of reason are bred in the bone here. The story is a feverish rebuke to the modern dogma of progress, the advertising world's sacred doctrine of human perfectibility. Elsewhere Keneally condemns the corruption of the church, the heartless political economy of the state, both modern and mercantile. But he distrusts the promiscuous promises of rationalism and technology just as much.

The good Catholic Glovers are the most inept of dairy farmers. Damian, the family's great hope, is returning home on college holiday. Like all families, the Glovers guard a host of profane secrets. Damian must return home to a farm where his parents pass a torturous existence as lumbering, human-headed cows. "The father" and "the mother" are victims of an absurd and terrible malady, which in the end is nothing so much as the human condition objectified and mythologized.

Damian's college girlfriend, the innocently tolerant Helen, has marriage on her mind, and Damian is sorely tempted. But Helen is "a squaw by nature," the desiccated product of a modern world that no longer believes in sin or the sacred. She can have no real sense of the profound violence, the irrational truth, embodied in the Glover family tragedy. A liberated woman, she approaches sex without any primitive sense of transgression. Damian recoils: "The path to her womb seemed suddenly as predictably laid down, with as much bland inevitability, as an expressway approach."

Needless to say, the Glovers are Catholics of the "old mold."

Nothing is clearly labeled around the Glovers' ramshackle and torpid homestead. No, the Glovers inhabit a world where the unconscious and the transcendent fatally mix, and where a biblical plague of frogs or a river of blood might pass for an everyday occurrence. Damian harbors an unholy passion for the "bountiful mystery" of his older sister, Barbara, who is variously described as a "dark avatar," "illimitable," "the sign of contradiction," and "the ultimate power against phantoms."

Sex is still a violent revelation, an encounter with the ultimate, for the atavistic Glovers; it alters perceptions and transforms lives, holding up a mirror to the hidden logic of human nature. Sorting out the obsessive character of sexual desire means sorting out family love. In that forbidden funhouse mirror, Damian's father, the "monstrous begetter," has a hankering for heifers, while his mother prattles on about the evils of contraception, the "filth" of sexuality, and the deliverance chastity offers. "The mother," as she is honorably regarded, even reckons her absurd, bloated misery a special sign from God.

Barbara Glover is the cause of these preposterous afflictions. Barbara's menarche, the inevitable occurrence of which she had been kept ignorant of by her folkishly pious mother, triggered a release of suprahuman powers. At the moment when "the circuits of nature had been affirmed in her" Barbara had, in fury, fear, and perhaps pride, cursed her pathetic parents, turning them into ersatz centaurs. "They had found their bovine selves, and now loped on four hoofs and had angular quarters like all the poor Glover cattle."

The parents' reversion to their latent "bovine selves," the story suggests, is the result of the "mighty shift in power and authority" conferred by the onset of a girl's sexual maturity. Ripe with the promise and danger of life, Barbara had become a woman to be reckoned with.

Barbara is a "witch" whose incipient womanhood has loosened the powers of creation. She is the sign and the incarnation of what is absolute and unfathomable, but also of what is most humanly abiding. She is Woman, with a capital W, the dark, uncontrolled, procreative force that mocks man's futile Faust-

Books discussed in this article:

Schindler's List, *Penguin, $7.95*
A Dutiful Daughter, *Penguin, $6.95*
Three Cheers for the Paraclete, *Penguin, $5.95*
The Playmaker, *Simon & Schuster, $18.95*

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ian effort at creating a world in his own image. Her powers are obscure but undeniable; they touch the beyond. But as such she is also the "dutiful" daughter, the guardian of hearth and home and the things of the earth: she harvests worms from the Glovers' nearby beach, milks her mother, and remains silent about her father's crimes, thus releasing her brother from the prison of family responsibility.

Keneally is a magician himself in this book, brilliantly giving dramatic life to every Oedipal fantasy. One particular genius of *A Dutiful Daughter* is to turn the archetypal parents' lower regions—the unimaginable instruments of unimaginable acts—into frankly animal parts.

If, initially, we stand in horror and confusion before the Glovers' bestial identities, we soon accede to the fable's audacious scheme. Metaphorically, we come to understand the Glovers as the most ordinary of families, and life with these cow-people works with a remarkable power on a psychologically realistic level. These are the plodding, ruminant parents that sloppily wait at home for every adolescent; these are the beasts that haunt our dreams, the beasts we will become.

In this sense, the Glovers are the voracious sexual monsters of Freudian conception: the father is driven to murderous debaucheries by his "bovine lusts," while the mother becomes a caricature of womanly nurture, her teats swaying painfully from her enormous, fetid torso. "We don't choose the lineaments of our needs," temporizes the bull-like Mr. Glover, "and from most points of view coupling was disgusting, even eating was obscene." Just how animal we are—and just how divine or damned the animal in us may be—is the imponderable at the heart of *A Dutiful Daughter*. In the best sense of the term, this is barnyard philosophizing and storytelling.

A Dutiful Daughter is perhaps Keneally's most flamboyant attempt to dredge deep for the origins and meaning of human desire and emotion. But that pull toward the depths is evident in all the novels under consideration here. In most instances, the lineaments of our needs remain mysterious. Oskar Schindler's heroic compulsion is linked to the contradictory notion of "sensual Oskar as a desirer of souls." James Maitland, the irascible priest at the center of *Three Cheers for the Paraclete*, is the author of inexplicable charities and seemingly concomitant insubordinations. In *The Playmaker*, Lt. Ralph Clark is delivered over to a fuller reality when the play he is casting begins to reshape the actual lives of those involved. "You looked at a person and understood she'd always been there, a germ in the brain, a hint in the blood"; that is how love is defined in *Blood Red, Sister Rose*.

Keneally courts the dangers of melodrama to get at truths that lie beyond the modern devotion to irony. He writes from the gut as much as from the head. In the prologue to *Schindler's List* and in the epilogue to *The Playmaker*, he admits as much. "Antibiotics and plumbing have made melodrama laughable to the modern reader," he complains. Prosperity and privilege insulate us from some elemental understanding of who we are and what our place is in the order of things. (A not un-Christian thought.) As a novelist Keneally elevates the incalculable, the dark, irrational and yes, melodramatic, dimension of life. In this

Paul Baumann's critical essay on Thomas Keneally is another in our series of articles on contemporary Catholic writers of fiction. We have asked our essayists to give an overview of the author's works, showing our readers where and how this writer locates the central human drama, the big questions, the religious crisis of our time. What does the Catholic sensibility of a Thomas Keneally have to tell us about our common world, about the state of our souls? Previous articles in the series include Rosemary Booth on Mary Gordon (August 12, 1988), John B. Breslin on Andre Dubus (December 2, 1988), Robert E. Hosmer on Muriel Spark (April 21, 1989) and Daniel Murtaugh on William Kennedy (May 19, 1989).

context, myth—the myths of history, and the myths of personal life—exposes the architecture of the human heart and soul. "For the thing about a myth is not whether it is true or not, nor whether it should be true, but that it is somehow truer than truth itself," he writes of the myth that survivors honored about Oskar Schindler. Therefore, Schindler's "unsubtle story," his "pragmatic triumph of good over evil," requires a certain literary indulgence. "For yes," Keneally similarly writes of the unlikely heroes in *The Playmaker*, "though they are fantastical creatures, they all lived."

That is as good an epigram for Keneally's fiction as any critic could devise. Keneally—with the essentially religious view that life is a mystery that enfolds human beings, not a problem they can abstract and solve—develops his abiding themes: the incalculable nature of human motives, the enigma of virtue, the intoxications of evil, the limits of reason, the value and necessity of sacrifice, and the redemptive quality of love.

Dutiful Daughter seems to have been written in some ways to answer, or certainly to echo, mythological questions raised in *Three Cheers for the Paraclete*. "We are not long out of the forest, really," the bombastic Monsignor Costello was fond of warning his seminarians. James Maitland, who is forever crossing chasubles with his superiors, is tormented by the discrepancy between his educated faith in reason and the archaic truth he longs to embrace. Reason can illuminate only a portion of a man's life, and is a notoriously cold comfort when contemplating the world's disproportions and tragedies—especially a world where betrayal is the most intimate secret two people are likely to share. Saying Mass on a beach for a motley collection of 1960s refugees,

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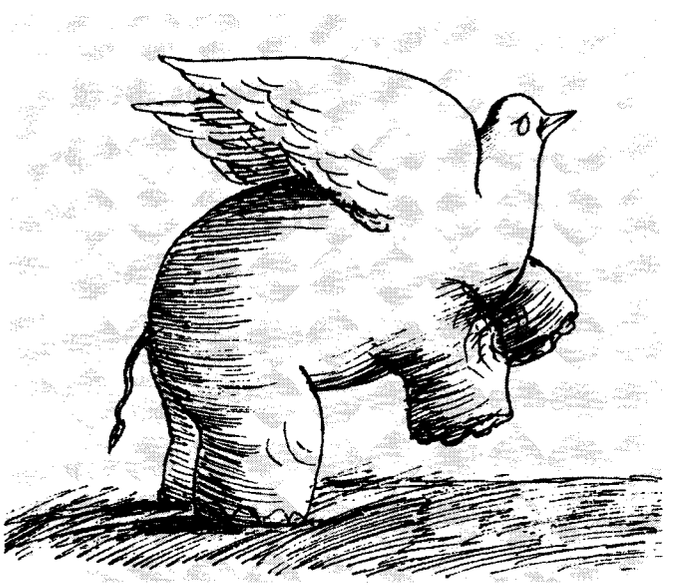
Maitland wonders if "perhaps his hearers had never felt, as he did, that they and he had been separated from their origins in the earth, and that the hill, the sea, the dark, and the wind encouraged a tracing of the tragedy."

It is not hard to see *A Dutiful Daughter* (and even *The Playmaker*) as just such an anthropological tracing. The connection is encouraged by the elegiac tribute to the doomed Glovers at the end of the novel. What, the narrator asks, will the future make of the Glovers' "curious remains"? Barbara and her parents are swept away in a cataclysmic flood, buried "eons or fathoms deep." But the truth of the Glovers' condition is also buried deep within each of us. The human body, with its odd assortment of parts, is not less or more "reasonable" than a cow's body. Whatever the shape of the body or its needs, it betrays us in the end. As St. Paul lamented, we are not even masters of our own will. Barbara Glover finds her strength inadequate before the mystery of her own nature. The only source of humility, hence understanding, against animal and "family pride" is to accept—indeed to honor sacramentally—the dying beast within. "Only a God is worthy to look at us," Barbara tells her parents. "Only a God is worthy to pity such great wounds."

Father Maitland, the brilliant academician, is looking for that kind of fierce pity. If his faith is moribund, he is still a man who needs his vows to be taken seriously. Indeed, he wants the church to hold him to his oaths, something the secular world, awash in its "loveless Scandinavian furniture," has no interest in doing. So even after exposing the intellectual fallacies of his detractors, Maitland clings to the "great scandalous body, that infamous but mystical corporation they called the church." He's an "institutional" man, bound if not gagged. In this unreasoning loyalty Maitland is like Barbara Glover (and Oskar Schindler). "No love is ideal," Barbara tells Damian. "We're cemented you, me, them. That's what decides what you'll be—the way you're locked. You can't risk those you unavoidably love."

Maitland is locked into relationships that bring on an absurd, often very funny, succession of contretemps and end with him before an inquisitional panel convened to determine his fate as a priest. In self-reproach he observes, "Their God was a kinsman, not an absolute, not a void in the heart." Caught between a church whose standards are merely self-serving ("Obedience," Maitland's superior tells him, "is better than any other thing on the earth.") and a secular world stupefied by a prosperity that turns every human sentiment into a commodity, Maitland struggles to hold on to his sense of mystery. He wants to believe in a "God of lightnings," the cosmic power that shook and ripped the earth and heavens into existence, and must in some manner sustain creation. He gets close to it in sacrament. Celebrating Mass on the wind-swept beach he is struck by "the sense that what he performed had an affinity with the earth and the elements of the blood."



Honoring that sense of connectedness and consecration, of simple, enduring human dignity, is paramount in Keneally's work. He shows a profound feeling for what Rudolf Otto defined as the sense of "the holy." A sense of awe and dread, a mixture of attraction and repulsion exists wherever people press against the boundaries of things. In *Three Cheers* Maitland prays—unavailingly, to be sure—for a "scalding sight of God which disrupts the network of his senses and rearranges them on a higher level ... [making him] aware of the underlying astringency of the Other's existence." That dread astringency is much like Miguel de Unamuno's assertion that although the Catholic "solution" cannot satisfy our minds, it will satisfy our wills and, therefore, our lives. "The God we desire," Unamuno writes, "the God who will save our soul from nothingness, the immortalizing God, must needs be an arbitrary God."

Maitland endorses that religious idea when discussing the blasphemous modern worship of individual will power. "Yes, you can be a saint if you want to," he says. "But then, what's the use of the idea of the divine, what's the use of mystery, rite, myth, the whole caboose, if you can be the man you want to be."

What's the use, indeed. In these novels people fail miserably at being who they set out to be, only to prevail at inexplicable vocations. Schindler is the most dramatic example. At first content to pursue nothing but pleasure and an easy fortune, he eventually finds himself risking everything and matching wits with the devil incarnate. The irony is intensified, as is the novel's heart-rending sense of human frailty, when Schindler fails at the simpler business of making a living after the war. This very human "god of deliverance" is in turn sustained by those he had risked his life to save. For Schindler to have been "exalted" when all around him conspired with an absolute evil, only to falter in a world of easy virtue, is one of the story's most authentic mysteries.

Schindler, "one of the church's least observant sons," was little more than a German war profiteer eager to follow the victorious Nazi army into Poland. A drinker, chronic philanderer, con-artist extraordinaire, he was no moralist in any conventional sense. No, Schindler did not possess a religious sensibility or a refined sense of social justice. Rather, it was his worldliness, his instinct for the concrete, his anachronistic respect for taboo, that allowed him, like the Glovers, to be "bullied by God." His reaction to Nazi crimes was instinctive;

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as unavoidable as Barbara Glover's obligations. "The revulsion Herr Schindler felt was of a piquant kind, an ancient, exultant sense of abomination—of the same sort as, in a medieval painting, the just show for the damned. An emotion, that is, which stung Oskar rather than unmanned him."

That is a revulsion, one can't help but suspect, the author finds conspicuously absent in a modern world that tirelessly boasts of its ability to adapt to anything. Schindler, with his "heroic liver," is a saint of the old school, not a pious moral bookkeeper, but a fallible man put to good and miraculous use by God. No psychological analysis of his selflessness is offered. Like the hidden movements of love, Oskar's heroism defies categorization. Explanations would distort the truth. Bearing witness, telling the story, is the only way to make this moral reality accessible.

Lieutenant Clark, in *The Playmaker*, is also the victim of circumstance. He goes to Australia a happily married man hoping to further his military career. His exile, the unsettling power of the place, and the accident of being ordered to stage a play, turn him into another man: into a different husband and father, a more ambivalent jailer, another kind of Christian.

Provost Marshal Harry Brewer, Clark's most pathetic companion, is an embezzler, an alcoholic, a coward, and cuckold. Yet his helpless, squalid devotion to the convict girl, "Duckling," engenders a loyalty that in the end alters the balance of power in the colony, while brilliantly dramatizing the absolute mystery of human love.

As Janette T. Hospital wrote in *Commonweal* (May 7, 1976), Keneally's heroes and heroines are "reluctant prophets," whose fates are shaped by overmastering forces. Ralph Clark, who must police the exile of Australia's convict settlers, is as much a prisoner as the men and women he commands. Away from his wife and child, Clark is beset by nightmares. He's "the most notorious dreamer in the colony" of Sydney Cove. Once again, as with Barbara Glover, the power over "loss, desire, jealousy"—the most human things—rests with women. In this case, it is the province of the "she-lags," the female convicts who are a continual source of sexual temptation.

Secret and blasphemous covenants govern their violent world. The legalistic Christianity of the powerful, represented by the penal colony's sanctimonious minister, is no match for the primitive spiritual power of the dispossessed. Nor can it make much of Australia and its aboriginal people, a continent apparently forsaken even by the Flood. "For this was a new state of being. The eight-moon passage to this place had been nearly as absolute a change as death...and therefore altered morality."

Clark's nightmares, his "Pharaoh-like burden of dreaming significantly," are exorcised through the sexual ministrations of the she-lag, Dabby Bryant, a sorceress of very palpable gifts. "He knew it was specifically the seed of his dreams that he was about to pass to her, and that the chance must be taken instantly," Clark judges.

A heavily freighted understanding of sex is in varying degrees present throughout Keneally's work. In acting on this curious prompting, Clark acknowledges the insufficiency of his own powers and will. To the extent that sexual need humbles us, it makes us more human, more open to the ineffable quality of existence. This notion is not far removed from the troublesome Catholic prescription that regards sex as unfulfilled if it does not remain open to procreation. In *The Playmaker*, the mystery of love carries us beyond ourselves to the very root and meaning of creation. Crude, fleshly love is where the spirit manifests itself most emphatically, and with frequently unforeseen consequences.

For example, Clark's eventual surrender to the she-lag, Mary Brenham, for whom he had guiltily nurtured a passion, is presented as a kind of epiphany. In choosing love, even adulterous love, Clark acts once again on the desire for salvation. Keneally's women are Madonnas of various sorts even when offering themselves as the most carnal of intercessors. Clark is granted a moment of wholeness with Mary Brenham, and finds the completeness of the world in giving himself to her. She receives the same gift in return. Keneally is very much like Norman Mailer—or an orthodox Catholic theologian—in endowing sex with such sacredness. As Mailer wrote in *The Prisoner of Sex*, the sexual act has a "meaning which went to the root of existence, or it did not....For it is obviously difficult to live with a metaphysics where humans are endowed with design yet the act which makes them is empty of it." In other words, we are either made in God's image or we are not.

A design is evident in the sexual experiences of both Lt. Clark and Barbara Glover. But Keneally is not a reductionist naively claiming that love conquers all, nor is he a moralist affixing abstract value to subjective feeling. Sex is a kind of sacrament in these novels, preserving its transcendental reality regardless of how people use it. In this context, Keneally's characters are never more fully themselves than when acquiescing to "those they unavoidably love." Maitland is finally his own man in accepting the discipline of his bishop. Barbara Glover discovers the truth about herself in humility. Schindler is "exalted" not by his own will, but by an "ancient, exultant sense of abomination" that placed an absolute value on human dignity. In each instance, these men and women recover an identity that transcends egotism in the act of self-sacrifice. In unconditionally giving up themselves they receive the gift of their true selves in return. In letting go, they take possession of their lives.

But if Keneally's heroes and heroines participate in some greater redemptive reality, it is never a question of easy grace. Most often these tales have the emotional and spiritual quality associated with the story of Abraham and Isaac. Again and again, we are returned to the impossible human moment when Abraham, in allegiance to a greater duty, raises his knife against his only son—moments in which a humbling creatureliness is fully recognized. Barbara Glover is so bound to her family, Maitland to his church, Clark to his prisoners/players/lover. *Schindler's List* is a litany of such choices, the most tragic of which is a doctor's decision to give his patients cyanide rather than allow the Nazis to kill them. "These things were never a matter of calculating sums," the doctor says. "Ethics was higher and more tortuous than algebra."

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Keneally's fictional world admits of a God, but it is for the most part the astringent Other whose thoughts are not our thoughts and whose ways are not our ways. The dark realm of the human spirit and God's silence in the face of evil predominate. For hope to exist in this world, like the hope Schindler inspired in his Jewish workers, it must transcend "mere realism": it must approach myth or religious truth. One survivor thinks of Schindler: "She feared his friendship. She wanted him to continue to be a presence, a magical parent. A paradise run by a friend was too fragile. To manage an enduring heaven, you needed someone both more authoritative and more mysterious than that."

The unlikely Schindler becomes just such a presence, a kind of Jacob who uses his native shrewdness to secure a future for his people. Schindler reawakens the possibility of life where only death existed. "Only madmen made promises absolute as that," one survivor thought of Schindler's guarantee of safety. "Yet he wasn't mad. For he was a businessman with a dinner to go to. Therefore, he must know. But that means some second sight, some profound contact with God or devil or the pattern of things. But again, his appearance, his hand with the gold signet ring, wasn't the hand of a visionary. It was a hand that reached for the wine; it was the hand in which you could somehow sense the latent caresses."

The incarnational nature of Keneally's cosmology resounds in this image of Schindler's hand, with its juxtaposition of the carnal and the divine. The spirit dwells in the flesh; what is timeless is manifest in every passing moment. In these novels the ultimate order of things has, to borrow another Unamuno phrase, a "human finality." Human existence is felt to be incomplete; our destiny is to seek a consummation that repairs the broken world. To secure an everyday reality, we need to know that our acts live on beyond death. For this to be accomplished we ask that suffering be justified, that our wounds be pitied. The life of the prisoner and the exile are paradigmatic, for their lives are rooted elsewhere.

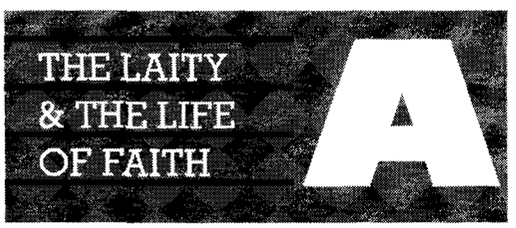
This is the world testified to in the familiar lyrical petition that begins "Hail, holy, Queen, Mother of Mercy," and goes on to describe how we, the poor banished children of Eve, send up our sighs, mourning and weeping from this valley of tears. After this our exile, it concludes, our lives will be fulfilled thanks to the blessed fruit of a woman's womb.

Like that simple prayer, Thomas Keneally's varied fictions root us realistically in the suffering and incompleteness of the world. But if Keneally's characters know banishment in their bones, they also are summoned to a greater destiny. If some call that melodramatic, so be it, for we are all fantastical creatures. □

MEETING GOD IN OTHERS

IN DAILINESS, SMALL MIRACLES

KATHY PETERSEN CECALA



At those times when I think of the Catholic laity, I don't always think of myself as being a part of that huge and diverse group. I think of teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers—people whose workaday lives involve some worthy human contact. There is some potential in those occupations, I think, for affecting the lives of others in a positive way, winning grace through the practical application of the commandment of love. But behind my computer, as an indexer for the nation's foremost business newspaper, there seems little opportunity for my faith to play any sort of role in my work, which deals primarily with the world of money: the intricacies of corporate finance and international exchange rates. I plod through industrial-production statistics and over-the-counter listings and other dense data; and only through the occasional insider-trading scandal, or when some hapless arbitrager goes berserk, does that dark "real" world of unpredictable human beings reach my computer screen. Even then, they are disposed of swiftly, converted into bytes and characters which glow briefly in amber, before I dispatch them, with a flick of a button, into the system's memory: an odd nether region I imagine as a sort of computer Purgatory, where all those nuggets of information, names and numbers, lie suspended in darkness, waiting to be brought back to life on someone else's screen.

When I enter my office building each morning, part of the huge World Financial Center complex in New York, I feel that I'm stepping into a secular cathedral; the cold marble floors, lofty windows, and hushed atmosphere evoke an unmistakable church-like feeling. The elevators, with their dark paneling, seem like confessionals, and I often have the uneasy feeling that I've exchanged one religion for another.

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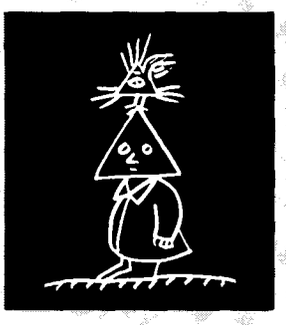
And I am, to be truthful, attracted by it all. It's very fashionable, trendy—still—to be involved in big business, and there's something seductive, compelling about the great game of Wall Street, megamergers and hostile takeovers, as well as the staggering, unreal amounts of money it all involves—and what that money can buy. And yet, probably because of my strict Catholic upbringing, it's a fascination I feel guilty about, like a sexual perversion of some sort, something forbidden and ultimately wrong. I worry that my growing fascination with money and business—and accompanying sense of materialism—is impeding my spiritual growth, setting up roadblocks in a path already filled with enough dips and twists and turns to last a lifetime.

Actually there is little chance that I will be sucked into this world of greed and power and desire. The work I do is not that exciting. While it concerns money, I have no contact with any, other than my weekly paycheck. Rather, I deal in information storage and retrieval, and so find myself in the cold, inhuman world of statistics and data. At times the job is challenging and fascinating, but it leaves me somewhat isolated in this world of people.

And I find that people are essential to my spiritual growth. That is where I find God, not in my computer screen (despite what some popular novels might have me believe), although the sheer complexity of the world I record dutifully each day suggests to me the workings of a much higher being. I often mourn the fact that my work does not bring me into closer contact with fellow humans, but it does, at least, propel me outward when work is over. My husband—who works as a graphics artist, alone at his drafting table, without much human contact as well—and I are active in our community and civic groups; we have strong ties to both our families and make an effort to strengthen friendships, some of which date back to childhood. But I find myself continually looking, seeking out more opportunity for connecting and sharing.

Seeing the corporate world on the scope that I see it in my everyday work—broken down into many, many tiny fragments and facts, intricate detail—gives me an interesting perspective on life. Just as I sort through vast amounts of data, trying to pinpoint what is essential, what is valuable, so too does my life—as a busy commuter, as a wife, as a Catholic—present myriad moments and experiences, which must be sorted through to determine what is meaningful, what is important. And sometimes there are incredible moments when I can actually feel God's presence, moments of light interspersed among the gray and every-day. These I consider tiny miracles, "miracles" in the most basic sense, from the Greek root, *mira*, to wonder. Moments to wonder.

An example, and this is an obvious, easy one. Sometimes, I go to Mass on my lunch hour, if for no other reason than to get out of the office, to get away from the relentless glare of my computer screen, particularly if my workload for the day is heavy and dull. I don't always go to the same church, and there is something profoundly moving about hearing my voice blend in with those of strangers around me, in response and in song. There is the sign of peace, turning to take the hand of the person



In 1987, *Commonweal* published a series of articles by lay people who described their personal experiences of faith in the work place. We received such positive response to the series that we decided to continue it. We asked each individual: How is your Catholic faith manifest in your daily life and work?

The third contributor to this renewed series is Kathy Petersen Cecala, an indexer for the *Wall Street Journal*.

beside me, or in back—perhaps another office worker, a Manhattan laborer. A stranger, and yet for a fleeting moment, the briefest second, our eyes meet and something passes between us, evident only in a faint smile of recognition, a slight bit more pressure in the handshake. We are special, you and I; we share something incredible.

But, of course, churches are great settings for little miracles: what's harder, a much bigger challenge, is meeting God outside church walls. It's very difficult, for example, to feel much love for humanity when I'm crammed into a rush-hour PATH train. My fellow Jersey commuters as a whole are an affluent but obnoxious lot, and there I am, jammed into a corner with someone's Rolex stuck in my face, another's Louis Vuitton tote stuck in my ribs, while the fellow next to me moans to his companion about taxes on his $300,000 summer home, or the unavailability of parts for his antique auto. But small miracles occur, even here.

One especially hectic Friday evening, midway under the Hudson between Jersey City and Manhattan, I sensed a weight pushing against my shoulder. Suddenly, the handsome, pin-striped-suited—and very, very pale—young man next to me sank to the floor of the train. After a brief second of shock, dread, or fear, everyone in the crowded car took action, as if we'd been organized beforehand. At once, everyone moved back, and several people stepped forward to loosen the man's tie and gently stretch him out; others pulled the emergency cord, and went searching for a conductor, a doctor. I remember a palpable sense of hope, as everyone waited, silently, for the man to be revived—there were no jeers, no remarks of anger or disgust, only quiet concern, hope. Everyone seemed to be holding his or her breath, waiting for an eyelid to flutter, some sign of life. When the young man finally did manage to rouse himself, and sit up wobbly, there was a collective gasp, some applause, and chuckles of relief.

This incident, when I think of it, still astounds me. When the train pulled into Hoboken, everyone dispersed, disappearing

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into the crowds, united only for a few minutes by a simple human drama.

The streets of the city offer many such moments, when another person enters our lives, however briefly, and changes it, sometimes subtly, almost imperceptibly, other times in more dramatic and permanent ways. I cannot forget the one winter evening, several years ago, when I darted out across Broadway on a green light, and the heel of my shoe abruptly snapped, sending me sprawling into the path of oncoming traffic. Before I could even react, or gasp, a man, whose face I never saw, scooped up and swept me over to the other side. He hurried away, a tall hunched figure, before I could even thank him for possibly saving my life; indeed, for risking his own.

Sometimes we get to play the savior, too. Once I was approached by a somewhat shabby, elderly woman who greeted me with a hug, a strange greeting: "Lydia, how nice to see you again!" I was about to shake her off, thinking her senile, when I noticed lurking behind her several unsavory looking characters. I quickly escorted her into a store, where she told me the men had been following her for several blocks, taunting her. When the coast was clear, I walked her to her destination, and I still remember her tearful gratitude.

These are special moments. They involve making a quick decision, a choice that reaffirms our faith. But even less dramatic moments are special, too, some so quick, so fleeting, you could miss them if you blink, or look away. Anytime I connect with someone else in a positive way, I feel good. For example, teaching a co-worker some complicated task on the computer. I show her and show her and show her, but she doesn't understand, doesn't get it, can't get it. Then suddenly, "Yes!" Or I see someone I had met at a seminar seven or eight months ago, and she greets me warmly, with recognition, even remembering the story I had told her about my mother-in-law.

Simply put, I find I meet God in others—in their love and concern and attention. And though my particular job at this time involves little contact with others, it does send me outward, to seek out this essential contact. There are enough of these moments to convince me that God's love is present always in our lives. Like Anne Frank, I believe that people are basically good at heart, and I believe it even though I have always worked in New York City and lived in the crowded, busy, industrial Northeast. I believe this even though I read continually of evil and corruption and injustice, even within the few city blocks in which I work. I believe, because there is always one small moment, some small miracle which occurs to give me reason to hope. □

Roy Shepard

Great Blue Heron

The wonder was mutual, I
not to be expected.

As for myself thought had narrowed
vision to the path proper
when below me blue of a steel
sky soundless his wings reached
rims of my world and lofted
us both.

Now across the canal he stood
all vertical at the water's edge
a wire only with an eye
for my passing.

SCREEN

FACTS OF (GHETTO) LIFE

'RIGHT THING' & 'LAST CRUSADE'

Spike Lee is now America's leading black filmmaker—perhaps the only one with a firm foothold in Hollywood. In previous films such as *She's Gotta Have It* and *School Daze* (both made on shoestring budgets), and in his new *Do the Right Thing* (financed by Universal Pictures), he provides an exciting but uneven blend of pop theatricality and social realism. It is hard to combine the two, and Lee doesn't always succeed in his new movie. But because frankness on black-white relations has become so rare—from any perspective—you really hope that someday he does.

Like Dick Gregory in his prime, Lee is unembarrassed by racial subjects; he calls his own production company, "Forty Acres and a Mule." In *Do the Right Thing* he presents—first from a comic and eventually a tragic perspective—some harsh aspects of black and other minority group life whose benefits from the civil rights movement have not included liberation from the ghetto. He doesn't hide excessive drinking, laziness, and the likelihood, on a hot summer day, of adolescent tempers rising to unreason and riot. He uses a jumbo ghetto blaster as a precipitating prop—a machine that older blacks as well as white characters know is really a weapon. But like Gregory, Lee is able to deflect his satire away from blacks to the cycles of poverty that keep some of them trapped. His blend of comic honesty, lack of self-righteousness, genuine pride, valid protest, and a larger vision of social causes is provocative.

Do the Right Thing, which Lee directed, produced, wrote, and stars in, is loud, often foul-mouthed, and extremely frank about racial antagonism—not just between white and black, but between black and Latin, Asian, and others. One sequence involves a set of expletives directed at everyone, so universal

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and absurd that it both disgusts and amuses, only half a comic purgation. The plot centers on a Bedford-Stuyvesant pizzeria owned by a middle-aged Italian (Danny Aiello, in his best role ever) who refuses to get out despite his son's disgust with the decay around them. Across the street, a Korean has opened a fruit stand and faces some of the same problems. Veteran actors Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis are also present as older blacks unable to diffuse rising racial tensions.

Neither can Lee, who puts himself in the middle as the pizza delivery man, often trying to diffuse the simmering anger between Aiello, his sons, and their customers. Wearing an old Dodgers' T-shirt with Jackie Robinson's number, Lee plays the delivery man as a frail thread holding the memory of an older Brooklyn together. He's got good instincts, sees every point of view, tries to explain things to mutual enemies—but fortunately isn't too good not to get distracted from work by friendship, mischief, a shower, or sex. In the end, he doesn't even do the right thing. But as director, Lee certainly makes the movie ask what might be, for all of us, the right thing to do about race hatred, mob violence, the intolerable conditions of ghetto life, and police over-reaction.

One need not agree with all of Lee's points to appreciate their timeliness. Lack of frank discourse about these subjects hasn't helped us lately, nor lack of recent film treatments (until *Mississippi Burning*). But conservatives haven't wanted to hear such discourse, and liberals are often too polite to face all the issues; hence benign neglect of black and white tensions on screen for almost two decades. As Spike Lee shows, it is not illiberal to face all the issues, and to acknowledge both the internal (as well as imposed) problems of ghetto life.

No one can really review *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*; what you do is analyze product design. The cliché about "the movie industry" gets too cozy from frequent reiteration; but sequels remind us of its plain truth. The industry sells toys—not tie-ins like dolls and sweatshirts, but the movies themselves—and it designs new ones simply by adding attachments, see, for example, *Star Trek V, Karate Kid III, Ghostbusters II*. At least, the new frills dollying up *The Last Crusade* are slightly intelligent.

The movie rounds up the usual suspects: Nazis, criminal masterminds, a blonde villainess; some unpleasantness with rats and snakes; hair's breadth escapes and chases (by air, sea, land, you name it). As usual, the rousing John Williams score strikes up the triumphant Indy theme at appropriate climaxes. As producer and story contributor George Lucas says of *The Last Crusade* and its predecessors: "they're like old 1940s' B-movies. In fact, those old B-movies have become A-movies." No longwinded study better condenses the film history of our times.

Fortunately, *The Last Crusade* at least touches on two important subjects, the family and the grail. At the 1987 Oscars, Steven Spielberg, director of all Indy movies, said that "we must renew our romance with the word." This seemed like penance at the time, and perhaps he still aims at some. Still, one takes small crumbs when offered. Spielberg, ever in love with boyhood (*Empire of the Sun*) and the father-son theme (*E.T.*) here provides Indy (Harrison Ford) with a a daddy—Sean Connery as a professor of medieval literature who has been obsessed with grail legends all his scholarly life.

In the opening sequence, Spielberg also provides Indiana Jones with a prehistory in the manner of *Godfather II*. We see Indy as a boy scout (River Phoenix) on his first adventure, saving a conquistador's cross from pillage by archeological vandals. Spielberg's deft hand is evident in the rapid-fire, breathless opening: an exuberant, immediate chase sequence aboard a circus train allows him to lasciviate in all sorts of boyhood fantasies. The chase ends in Indy's home—with an invisible dad too involved in his own scholarship to pay attention to his son's exploits.

The theme is resumed in Indiana's later life. The earlier invisibility is key: it lays the groundwork for the family plot in which, amid harum-scarum adventures, father and son find new closeness. In short, *The Last Crusade* substitutes the new au courant romance of home life—fathers and sons in some movies, mothers and babies in scores more—for the traditional romance of boy meets girl. But then, on screen at least, no one believes in that kind of thing anymore. Spielberg manages to give the theme of fathers and sons against the woman his usual (unconscious) Oedipal twist; the episode is a slight but noteworthy pop culture Freudian slip.

RUTGERS

Conflict and Change in the Catholic Church

JOHN SEIDLER and KATHERINE MEYER
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Connery is tweedy, daffy, and both scared by and mad at his son's tendency to draw machine-gun fire. The comic byplay between him and Ford is handled well, even though both actors are slumming. Ford (who varies Indy adventures with the finer *Witness*, *Mosquito Coast*, and *Working Girl*) gives Jones his usual tongue-in-cheek individuality. With both the Spanish cross and other artifacts stolen by bad guys, Indy also gets to say, "that belongs in a museum!" If curatorial ethics become a firm part of his heroism, it might even confer prestige on museum-going. For young viewers of this kind of movie, any encouragement helps.

Some religious sensivity is used in treating the legend of the grail's whereabouts and meaning. The Nazis and their cohorts want it for occult reasons, or, as one claims, because it will confer eternal youth. At least Denholm Elliot, as Jones's friend, gets to point out that it really "stands for the divine in all of us." Except for *The Last Temptation* no other mass market American film in two decades has even mentioned such things. *The Last Crusade* is nowhere near Chrétien de Troyes, or Parsifal, even on a pop level; Spielberg was much closer to real magic and the supernatural with *Encounters of the Third Kind*. But at least *The Last Crusade* involves no sacrilege. TOM O'BRIEN

BOOKS

Eric Gill: another version

ERIC GILL
A Lover's Quest for Art and God
Fiona MacCarthy
A William Abrahams Book/E.P. Dutton, $26.95, 338 pp.

Robert Gilliam

Eric Gill is a figure at least vaguely familiar to many *Commonweal* readers. The *Commonweal* masthead is printed in one of Gill's many typefaces (Gill sans ultra bold). In the interwar years and in the generation following his death in 1940, much of the interest in Gill was specifically Catholic. More recently, attention has focused on Gill's prodigious and various artistic production, and with good reason. As Fiona MacCarthy writes, "No one has approached his mastery over a range of [artistic] activity."

Ms. MacCarthy's biography relies on more than fifty interviews with Gill's family and associates. She has traveled widely to consult the far-flung Gill archives. Though earlier Gill biographers had access to his diaries, she is the first to draw extensively on them. Gill kept a meticulously detailed diary from the age of fifteen until his death. It is a careful log of expenditures and activities, particularly artistic and sexual; these latter revelations dramatically alter our sense of Gill. Before this he had seemed charmingly exuberant about sex, a bit adolescent, endlessly curious and enthusiastic. There was, however, a much darker side. MacCarthy records many infidelities—both before and after his conversion to Catholicism in 1913—with prostitutes, employees, colleagues, and friends. He had an occasional sexual relationship with two of his sisters, engaged in some homosexual activity in the course of his erotic threesome with Robert and Moira Gibbings, recorded a casual sexual experiment with a dog, and, most alarming, two incestuous contacts with his teen-age daughters. Of the last, he wrote, "This must stop," as, apparently, it did. The biography portrays Gill as an insatiable sexual adventurer and predator.

One way and another, Gill left so much behind him: over 100 figures or reliefs in stone; over 750 pieces of inscriptional lettering; half a dozen typefaces; 1,000 engravings; 300 pamphlets, articles and books. He made wonderful things. But in some ways one remembers him most for his impression on the minds of other people. Gill was a most extraordinary person, and it is very strange how his immediacy lingers.

—Fiona MacCarthy
Eric Gill

One of Gill's favorite catch phrases and the title of a collection of his essays was "it all goes together." He wanted to integrate faith and work and family life, to make of his life an integral whole, "a cell of good living in the chaos of our world." To many, it seemed he had. But we see here a life which, for all its remarkable accomplishments, did *not* go together. Though MacCarthy uncovers these profound contradictions, she does little to explain them. She offers some vague sociological generalizations which are less than helpful. Her occasional forays into psychological explanation, though not implausible, are less than enlightening. The diaries provide a detailed record of behavior, without any accompanying reflection. Since Gill not only so carefully kept the diaries, but also later provided a key to their code, we can only surmise that he wanted to be found out.

Apart from the two incidents with his daughters, Gill seems fairly comfortable with his sexual sins, though he reports confessing them. His wife, Mary, knew about some of his escapades. There seemed little effort on Gill's part to hide them. And though MacCarthy reports some

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strains, the marriage seemed remarkably happy and unaffected. "Gill's relations with Mary in themselves were very simple: they pleased each other and they went on pleasing one another as long as life continued." Gill inspired the love and loyalty of some very extraordinary people—Edward Johnston, David Jones, Donald Attwater, Vincent McNabb, and Stanley Morison. "In his human feeling Gill was constantly engaging. No one who knew him well failed to like him, to respond to him. And his personality is still enormously arresting."

MacCarthy likes Gill and she likes his work, though she pays little attention to and implicitly dismisses his social, religious, and artistic thought. She easily loses patience with him. The second half of the book is more hurried and less sympathetic. In his later years, she portrays him as a little ridiculous, "the aging satyr." Though she does not condemn him, you feel she cannot quite forgive him his sexual excesses. The book is at its best on the intensely religious and communal years at Ditchling in Sussex where Gill was at the center of the Guild of St. Joseph and St. Dominic, a group of artist-craftsmen, most of them Dominican tertiaries, who lived simply and devoutly making beautiful and useful things. But even here one would like to know more of Gill's rather harsh and sudden break with the Guild.

This is a handsome and well written book. It has abundant, well chosen, and attractive black and white illustrations. There are good notes and a bibliography at the back, but no intrusive notes in the text. In these respects, it is a model of serious popular biography.

I first came to Gill twenty years ago, led by the Catholic Worker. I liked the work and found it beautiful; clear, strong, and vivid. Mostly, I liked his lucid Catholic radicalism, his fierce and thoughtful rejection of the industrial world, his emphasis on work and community, his friendships. But the deep contradictions in him do not go away. As MacCarthy observes, "he was not a humbug." He remained, despite his sins, seriously and deeply Catholic. None of his thinking about the theological significance of sex and its centrality, beauty, and goodness is unorthodox. None of his hostility to prudery implied any disagreement with the traditional condemnations of fornication and adultery, which though he accepted, sinned against so regularly. In all this Gill was, I think, not trying consciously to defend or exonerate himself, but to raise sex within marriage to its rightful prominence.

Though Gill can never be the same after MacCarthy's biography, I like to recall the kind words of Gill's friend, Brocard Sewell in his memoir, *My Dear Time's Waste*, "When I am asked what I thought of Eric Gill and what manner of man he was I always answer that he represents my idea of the holy man. Sometimes people who knew him have expressed surprise at this, principally on the grounds that the sixth and ninth commandments sometimes gave him trouble. But the saint is not the man who is immune from the commoner human weaknesses; he is a man who loves God and his neighbor with all his heart, and Eric did that to a degree I have seldom encountered." Only Father Sewell can say whether his generous assessment has survived the reading of this disturbing book. □

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BOK'S PEACE PLAN: WHAT'S MISSING?

A STRATEGY FOR PEACE
Human Values and the Threat of War
Sissela Bok
Pantheon, $17.95, 202 pp.

Jean Bethke Elshtain

Prior to World War I, liberal internationalist hopes soared. Some 194 treaties containing provisions for arbitration of disputes had been signed. Over 425 international peace organizations existed. Universal Peace Congresses had become an annual affair. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace had been established in 1910 with a fund of $10 million to study the causes of war, to promote international law, and to influence public sentiment against war. It seemed that Immanuel Kant's belief, that peace would come about given the spread of republican governments and the growth of commercial interdependence, might come to pass. Then came August 1914.

What Michael Howard calls "the liberal conscience" arose in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe as a response to the incessant state of wars in which Europe had been embroiled. International lawyers of this period worked to codify rules of war in a way aimed at civilizing war, if not eliminating it. Increased emphasis was placed on international understanding in the hope that if people could communicate openly they might be able to adjudicate their differences amicably. Montesquieu was firm in his belief that peace would come about as nations grew more "mutually dependent" through trade. These liberal humanist beliefs died hard; indeed, they can scarcely be said to have died at all, as Sissela Bok's new book proves.

Bok's is a seasoned, liberal conscience. She worries about moralistic appeals that serve as cover for one's own unprincipled scheming or unreasoning aspirations. She appreciates the continuing need for self-defense and, a term she prefers, self-protection. She believes human beings have it within their capacities as individuals and, analogically, as collective entities (in our world they are called nation-states), to achieve "mastery" and continuous "growth." She finds hope in our "present crisis" and that hope is grandly cast as she proclaims her own intentions for her book: it aims "to propose steps toward a secure and lasting peace that are practical, nonutopian, and in keeping with widely shared human values." Her claims are exigent. She believes we have "no choice" but to consider how "to take concerted and meaningful action at every level...." If not, we face only disaster and, down the road just a piece, the fulfillment of Hobbes's terrible characterization of the state of nature in which life is "nasty, brutish, and short."

Bok's argument turns explicitly on a belief in "fundamental values" with valid application to public and private life alike. A synthetic approach that seeks the commonalities, or works to forge them, between any and all diverse peoples, regions, religious and sectarian belief systems, and concepts of national interest, is vital and required. Moreover, one can both analyze and prescribe for nations in and through analogies from "living organisms" with their stresses, weaknesses, contagions, and "pathologies." The analogy between "individual and state action holds" when it comes to moral prohibitions as well as aspirations that are both ideal and realistic. Thus constraints against violence, deceit, betrayal, and excessive secrecy where "governments" are concerned correspond to positive moral principles applicable to individuals. Bok relies as well on a generic or "specieswide" notion of humanity. The threat is generalized and so, she insists, must be the "collective" response. Nothing less than "humankind" must learn to "respond more wisely to the threat of war" than it has in the past.

Each of her assumptions can be challenged. But I am more interested in pointing to what her account requires her to omit. She forgoes any explicit discussion of the exponential growth of what Clifford Geertz has called "granulated" nationalisms in the post-World War II era. Between 1945 and 1968, sixty-six new states were born out of the wreckage of old colonial empires. Nationalism is a "major collective passion," needed or deployed to confront the external world of estranged others and, as well, to combat tendencies toward tribal or regional fragmentations within. The *intifada* is about national aspirations denied.

This points to a critical flaw in Bok's analysis. She argues that, to build the confidence needed to forestall a cataclysmic future war, various integrative and cooperative agreements signed by European nations "should be negotiated" and applied "to every region in the world." My hunch is that Qaddafi will be rather resistant. And Shamir. And Arafat. And...the list goes on. There is a paradox in all of this, namely, that European-style nationalism, sovereignty, and promulgation of interests has been embraced worldwide. But many of those newly come to national identities are not exhausted, as was postwar Europe, by the excesses of nationalistic bellicosity. Nor are these other nations *permitted*, in a sense, the forms of European cooperation Bok extols. External constraints, stringent limits to state action in Western and Central Eastern

> *To be effective, a strategy for peace must be capable of the widest possible application. As a result, it must set forth a moral framework that pertains both to public and to private life, that can be shared by religious and secular traditions alike, and that is applicable both within and between nations.*
>
> —Sissela Bok
> *A Strategy for Peace*

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Europe, have existed since 1945 in the form of an American-dominated NATO and a Soviet-dominated Warsaw Pact. It is far too early in the seductive—at times ennobling, at others, barbarizing—forging of national identities, often in opposition to specific others, to expect all non-Europeans to follow any time soon the paths now being trod by the old and antibellicose nation-states of Europe.

My point is: neither nations nor strong nationalisms—extant, emerging, or reemerging—will go away. The excluded do not disappear, they reappear as, for example, militant Shi'ia nationalism. No realistic alternatives to the nation-state currently exist. Indeed, we now have a name for what can happen, under current conditions, when a central, national authority disintegrates: Lebanonization. As well, what might be called the sacrificial dimension of war, the enacted conviction that one is giving one's life in order that others might live, must be reckoned with. Here Bok would have been well-served had she read and used J. Glenn Gray's masterwork, *The Warriors*. It offers the most powerful, philosophically informed account we have of soldiering in its many forms and the opportunities for collective action—for going beyond or outside the boundaries of the singular, self-interested self—wartime danger and sacrifice seem to offer.

Bok would also have done well to separate Hegel from her rogues' gallery of war enthusiasts. (The other two named are de Maistre and Mussolini.) Hegel's *Kriegstaat* is no day at the beach, that's for sure, but neither is it merely a despicable celebration of war's glories. Instead, Hegel insists, and this insistence helps us to make sense of contemporary nationalism, that states come into being as collective entities through a struggle and in order to attain recognition. Statehood is the membership card in the world of international actors. War has been the means to attain that recognition. The state is free that can defend itself, gain the recognition of others, and shore up a proclaimed and acknowledged identity.

All humane, concerned, and decent people have trouble accounting for modern state worship; all hope for other ways to settle disputes. But war isn't simply, perhaps not even primarily, about settling disputes or negotiating interests. It is about identity, personal and collective, and unless one comes to grips with that, one's strategies for peace must inevitably fall short. □

ESPIONAGE TURNS A CORNER

THE RUSSIA HOUSE
John le Carré
Knopf, $19.95, 353 pp.

Barbara A. Bannon

Tantalizingly unlike anything he has written before, even though it deals with the world of spies and counterspies, le Carré's twelfth novel explores the craft of espionage and its practitioners, professional and amateur, in the era of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. That timing, which leaves the reader fascinated, might have come right out of today's newspaper headlines. But there is much more to what this former member of Britain's Foreign Service has to say in his most important work to date.

He is not afraid to make moral judgments, to place his people, both Russian and British, in situations where they must consciously reach decisions of choice where "good" and "evil" are far from easy to define and even more difficult to act upon. And he does all this without ever letting up on the tension and suspense of superb storytelling.

"The Russia House" is the unofficial name given in London to the building that houses Britain's top secret anti-Soviet Intelligence operations. When a bewildered Polish-born Briton turns up with a highly secret manuscript, which a Russian woman gave him at a trade fair to smuggle out of that country, it is to "The Russia House" that he eventually finds his way.

Thus begins le Carré's in-depth probe of the lengths to which secret agents of any country will go. First comes the hunt for the hard-drinking, womanizing, not very successful British publisher, Barley, to whom the Russian author wants to assign his manuscript. What is the connection between the two men? Are the hair-raising revelations in the manuscript true or is the whole thing a Soviet plant? Can Barley be persuaded to go to Moscow and Leningrad and seek out the mysterious author, always under careful topnotch British supervision? To do so, he must first find the Russian woman courier. Step by exciting step things begin to happen.

Along the way we encounter the intense and often bitter rivalry between British and American Intelligence who distrust each other almost as much as they do the Russians. There is the astonishing disclosure that in any important joint Intelligence operation the Americans officially have the final say. Some of the Intelligence operatives are likable, some are despicable. One thing is made clear. Spies do not like to be made fools of and lose their jobs any more than the rest of us do.

Barley and Katya, the Russian woman, fall in love, naturally and believably. There is a charming countryside picnic scene involving the two of them, Katya's two children, and her elderly uncle. There are some wonderful scenes involving Barley, a saxophone player, and Russian jazz enthusiasts.

The most intriguing and ultimately touching figure in the novel is the Soviet scientist who wants to get word to the West of worldwide significance. Idealistic, more than a little mad, he is a Russian the likes of whom we have not met before in espionage fiction. And it is le Carré's sympathetic characterization of this man, code named "Bluebird," that makes it so incredible that *The Russia House* is scheduled for syndication in the Soviet Union magazine, *Ogonyok*. There is also talk of the Australian director, who is filming the

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book based on Tom Stoppard's screenplay, going to Russia to receive permission to film scenes in Moscow and Leningrad.

The ending to any suspense novel should never be disclosed, but it is fair to say le Carré's finale is as deliberately enigmatic as he wants it to be. The reader is lured into thinking, "This must certainly be the way things will work out," and then forced to wonder, "Why do I think that?"

In his last novel, *The Perfect Spy*, David Cornwell (le Carré's real name) gave us a sardonic and moving semi-fictional portrait of a charming scoundrel, based on his real life father, someone who has haunted his life for years. Now, in *The Russia House*, he goes even further. Unlike many best-selling authors, Cornwell has always stood aloof from personal publicity. The fact that he has now permitted himself to be interviewed in some depth by the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and other media says a lot about all that *The Russia House* means to him personally and professionally. What he is telling us in this novel is what he truly believes and sometimes despairs of ever being made public. Espionage is a filthy game that must be played at times and becomes at other times so self-involving for the participants that they cannot escape from it, cannot live without it.

Even as one longs to learn what may lie ahead for these very credible Russians, British, and Americans, there is an even more arresting thought in mind. What will John le Carré write about next? After *The Russia House*, anything more about "Smiley's People" seems impossible. Things have changed. □

MOTHER COMPLEXITIES

MATERNAL THINKING
Toward a Politics of Peace
Sara Ruddick
Beacon Press, $24.95, 291 pp.

Elisabeth Young-Bruehl

Feminist discourse about male dominance had a frightening moment in the 1970s. Attention was directed to the neglected sphere where women, not men, dominate—mothering, early child care. But a specter arose: perhaps it is mothers who foster male dominance by reproducing motherhood in their daughters and urging an autonomy upon their sons that leads to misogyny, a kind of *lèse majesté* against moms. After critics began to cry "blaming the victim," another wave of attention revealed various images of mothering—operating "in a different voice," in Carol Gilligan's phrase—that redirected the great search for the whys and hows of male dominance. Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking* originated in this second wave of feminist concern with motherhood.

In stolid, sometimes sentimental, but very clear and nonthreatening philosophical language, Ruddick argues for two claims. The first is that different types of thinking arise from different types of activity or practice. The practice specific to mothers, meeting the demands of children for "preservation, growth, and social acceptability," gives rise to "maternal thinking," which is, summarily, "attentive love." More elaborately, it is noninstrumental, nonacquisitive thinking that is flexible in the face of change, resiliently good-humored, development-nurturing, and richly focused on social relationships. On the last count, maternal thinking can slip into the frightening business of fostering male dominance, for mothers can want their children to be socially acceptable on patriarchal terms. So maternal thinking needs feminist consciousness to avoid supporting the status quo.

The second claim is that maternal practice and thinking, corrected with feminist consciousness, can and should influence public policy, converting it from militarism to peace. Ruddick's hope is for "a feminist maternal peace politics." In this argument, there is no indication of what kinds of practice Ruddick considers the source of feminist thinking, which is charged with being the corrective. To me it is not clear why "feminist peace politics" would not be a more powerful means to the desired goal than "feminist maternal peace politics."

Sara Ruddick is alert to the empirical and political complexities that trouble her arguments. First, mothers, maternal practices, and maternal thinking all come in many varieties, historically and in the present tense. The strategies Ruddick uses to meet this problem clash with each other constantly. On the one hand, she uses universal concepts—there is just one "maternal thinking," not a plurality—and on the other hand, she often frankly admits that she is conceptualizing on the basis of her own late twentieth-century American, urban, middle-class liberal, areligious, married mothering of a daughter and a son. The autobiographical strain in the book shows humility and great sensitivity to conflicting views among mothers and about them. But the generalizations wing right over complex terrain, leaving behind specificities of political culture, historical experience, class, race, sexual orientation, religion. Here is an example of Ruddick's philosophical flight: "... there is in maternal thinking a sturdy antimilitarist conception of the body. In this conception the body is not fearful, either in its pleasures or its suffering. Birth is privileged over death and with that privilege comes a commitment to protect and a prizing of the physical being in its resilience and variety. Bodies are at least as important as the causes that use them...." She acknowledges that many mothers would find such conclusions unintelligible, but she still attributes them to "maternal thinking" generally construed.

Because she only posits but does not explore in their diversity types of links between practices and thinking, Ruddick can only invoke submission to patriarchy as an explanation for why mothering does not inevitably result in nonviolent politics. She is certainly aware that, to protect her child, a mother may work for world peace, but she may also work for the death

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of her enemies. Mothers who turn militarist do pose questions to Ruddick's general position, and she admits of militaristic mothers whose "continued support for war needs explaining," but she does not explain. Similarly, she does not consider why so many of the female theorists of nonviolence she cites are not mothers. From the contemporary world scene, dotted with wars and struggling peace groups, Ruddick selects only one example of "maternal thinking" to look at in detail: the Argentine and Chilean *madres* who have so courageously protested their governments' "disappeared" policies of torture and murder. But these are not, Ruddick admits, peace groups; they are resistance groups. Their resistance strategies are nonviolent—they have no weapons—but they have not translated their brand of resistance into opposition to militarism or national war. The slogan "The Malvinas belong to us and so do our sons" is heartbreakingly complex.

The second context that Ruddick's work does not account for is historical and political. She hopes that maternal thinking will be a key, if not the key, source of opposition to militaristic public policy, but she also supplies the voice of political realism by presenting her hope as an empowering myth, not a tribute to an emergent political reality. Even so, she seems to me to slight the diversity of sources that have historically inspired peace movements in local, national, and international contexts. Pacificism is nearly as old as war, and international peace movements and congresses began to work for political, legal, and moral strictures against war in the wake of the 1848 European revolutions. Ruddick gives no indication of what thinking and what conditions brought her feminist and nonfeminist, female and male, predecessors to their work. It is certainly the case now that women are contributing more to peace movements than they ever have before, both because more women are engaged in public spheres and because they bring to their activism so little experience as officers and gentlemen. But they build on a legacy of successes and failures and come to their convictions and political practices from very diverse backgrounds, as the 1988 anthology *Women on War* richly and eloquently demonstrates. *Maternal Thinking* is so much in the spirit of "in a different voice" feminism that it misses the full peace chorale. □

REVIEWERS

ROBERT GILLIAM *is a librarian at SUNY Brockport.*

JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN *is the Centennial Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University. Her most recent book is* Women and War *(Basic Books, 1987). With Sheila Tobias she is the editor of the forthcoming,* Women, Militarism and War: Essays in Feminism, Politics and Social Theory, *to be published this year by Rowman and Allanheld.*

BARBARA A. BANNON *is the former executive editor and forecast editor of* Publishers Weekly. *She was one of the founders of the National Book Critics Circle and has been a Pulitzer Prize judge.*

ELISABETH YOUNG-BRUEHL *is the author of two biographies,* Hannah Arendt *and* Anna Freud. *A collection of her essays,* Mind and Body Politics, *will appear this month.*

CATHOLIC VOICES

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CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 386)

that *Humanae vitae* had failed the test of history and that it has "so far failed the church." The editors' reply restated the opinion that "the terrible human costs of our culture's disarray in sexual matters is 'exhibit A' of those who currently defend the encyclical." The editorial as well found that "the prohibition against artificial contraception, especially the pill, seems more arbitrary and ungrounded today than it did in 1968."

Experience over the last thirty-five years has revealed these facts:

1. The movement from the use of contraception to natural methods is from 50 to 70 percent in those communities where natural methods are offered. The greatest pill users are young women entering childbearing years.

2. The tragic physical consequences of technological means of birth control are now well-documented and are attributed to the radical violation of reproductive biology of the woman. The action of the pill is claimed by the drug companies who manufacture these products to be threefold—contraceptive, sterilizing, and abortifacient (See: literature in pill packages.) The intrauterine device is abortifacient and is related to pelvic and tubal infection resulting in ectopic pregnancies, sterility, and septic abortions.

3. The method-related pregnancy rate for the pill is quoted as in the vicinity of 2 percent, that is, when it is used in accordance with the instructions provided by the drug company. The method-related pregnancy rate for intrauterine devices is between 5 and 7 percent. The rate for barrier methods varies between 5 and 20 percent. In the various trials of the Billings Ovulation Method which have been properly conducted, the method-related pregnancy rate is less than 1 percent.

4. We see many young couples who have been rendered childless by using the contraceptive pill become embittered toward their doctors. We also see the tragedy of cancer of the cervix, abortion, sexually transmitted disease, psychological and other attendant disorders in young women due to the change in sexual lifestyle which has been liberated by easily accessible birth control. This is the history, still being enacted and now most tragically in the AIDS epidemic that is killing adults of reproductive age. Common sense must surely see that *Humanae vitae*'s directions for fidelity and love between men and women will not "fail the test of history" as the editors of *Commonweal* predict.

5. The failure of expensive and brutal birth-control programs to substantially limit population growth, is experienced in several poor countries.

The desire to eliminate the reproductive outcome of the act of intercourse is to separate oneself from the Creator's plan. Prevention or destruction of life results. The act of love is a divine gift intended for the delight and continuing good of mankind. In the presence of extreme anxiety to achieve a pregnancy, the act sometimes loses its tenderness and love and becomes a procedure. In the urge to experience physical pleasure and the extreme anxiety at the same time to avoid conception, the act becomes self-centered.

Pope Paul VI was right indeed to worry about marital infidelity and general lowering of moral standards, including the lowering of the status of women, following on the practice of artificial methods of birth control. Those who teach natural family planning, as I do, see the rehabilitation and restoration effected by the gentle discipline of natural family planning. Pope John Paul II and Pope Paul VI before him have both been gallant upholders of women's rights.

The church has not lost its credibility. People have for too long been listening to those who have challenged her credibility, blaming her for not accepting the pill as the editorial does. People have been encouraged when in trouble, to make personal decisions, without knowledge of all the facts or possible consequences. Expedient advice has often been given compassionately, but without proper consideration or knowledge.

Humanae vitae, by protecting the divine plan for human love and life, speaks definitively of faith and morals. This should not be confused with the issue of the papal states which is not a matter of definitive teaching. Catholics believe that protection of our relationship with God lies in church teaching. Those who question this mandate soon go further in questioning the other treasured links between us and God—the choice of a Virgin to bring the Son of God to the world and the resurrection without which there is no redemption, and the Eucharist—our everyday contact with Christ.

In his article, Robert Hoyt argues that Catholic moralists and hierarchs have a problem in being bound by codes formulated before a full understanding of the problem was reached. Therein lies the essence of the mystery of the infallible church, which simply and clearly defines the principle in the divine plan. If the church waited for full human understanding it would wait forever while fallible man argues. Had Paul VI said "yes" to the pill, in our present state of greater knowledge we would be indeed justified in questioning the church as an infallible custodian of the divine plan. Mr. Hoyt advocates change in codes of morality. By what criterion? By fallible man's false sense of compassion to solve human problems with the very best intentions or simply to yield to the cry for sexual freedom? I can sympathize with him as he talks to all the groups that he mentions and agree that they all exist. For some, as history unfolds there is much sorrow, regret, and loss. There are two he hasn't mentioned. Those who hung in, not because they liked the teaching, but out of duty, and those who left and later returned. In these two groups he would see the real joy that these people, assisted by natural family planning, have found in a mutual love which may have endured hardship, but which now pervades and governs all that they do for each other and for their children.

If morality can be defined as a mode of behavior which cooperates with the divine plan, it simply remains that common sense (if not love or honor) demands that we follow it. That there is a body (the church) which proclaims and teaches it, is our own good fortune as Christians. For people of other faiths and even of none at all, common sense (the gift of divine providence) is a good teacher. It is strange that the editorial and article should ignore

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both church teaching and common sense. It could not be said that *Humanae vitae* had failed the church if it had merely prohibited the use of the pill and so prevented untold physical harm for those who obeyed, but it was a much wiser document and much more positive than prohibitive.

The pill that is worshiped is a god whose feet of clay are crumbling. If a church with such a mandate as it has, states that contraception is objectively sinful, faith demands that it should be heeded. When close scrutiny of the facts is made, common sense alone should prevail.

"Anniversary Waltz" and "Sex: How Odd of God" express lack of faith and lack of common sense.

DR. EVELYN L. BILLINGS

The editors reply:

Dr. Billings has written a long letter, filled with observations, some of them wise, some of them dubious, and most (of both kinds) unsubstantiated. We are frankly surprised that her letter, although obviously heartfelt, shows little of the careful reasoning associated with scientific discussion.

In the end these observations boil down to two convictions:

1. The pill and other forms of contraception are bad, especially in comparison to the Billings technique, and a host of evils can be laid at their doorstep.

2. The prohibition of contraception, except by periodic abstinence, is infallible doctrine.

The connection between these two convictions is not entirely clear. If the second is true, then the first, strictly speaking, is irrelevant or at most auxiliary. But at one point Dr. Billings makes the curious suggestion that she might well question "the church as infallible custodian of the divine plan" if Paul VI had not happened to agree with what Dr. Billings thinks is the current judgment on the pill.

In any case, point 1 presents a number of "facts," many of which are questionable. Others are undeniable. None necessarily lead to the conclusions that Dr. Billings apparently has in mind. But as a serious attempt to measure the consequences of different forms of contraception, whether by barrier methods, the pill, intrauterine devices, or periodic abstinence, Dr. Billings's observations are selective and biased.

To take up only one issue, the literature on outcomes of different methods of contraception is notorious for pitfalls. There are complicated problems of self-selected or unequally motivated users, of different socio-economic groups, of drop-out rates, and of the quality of instruction.

Comparisons between trials of different methods can be radically altered by adding qualifications—as Dr. Billings does—such as, "which have been properly conducted" to the trials of one method without making sure that the same qualifications apply to the figures being cited for other methods. The very concept of "method-related pregnancy rate" is preferred by advocates of contraception through periodic abstinence because it eliminates pregnancies resulting when couples opt for (or risk?) intercourse at times when they know that conception is

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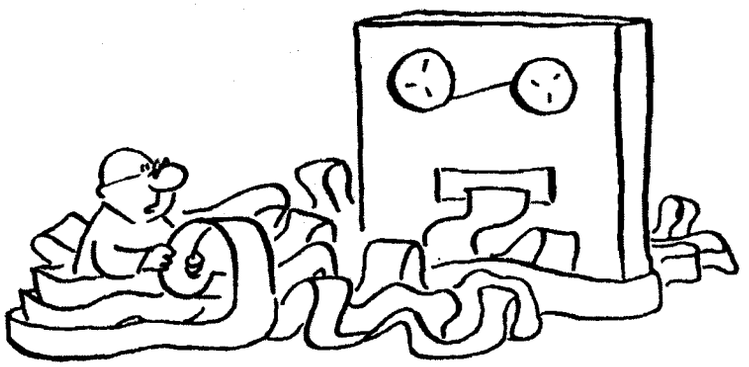
possible. These are categorized as "informed-choice" or "wanted" pregnancies.

Last February, Dr. John Queenan, chairman of obstetrics and gynecology at Georgetown University Medical School, was cited as saying that the latest studies of the ovulation method based on changes in cervical mucus at the time of fertility show pregnancy rates ranging from 14 to 35 percent when it is used alone and from 11 to 20 percent when it is combined with charting changes in fertility-related body temperature.

A year ago, the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) reported a survey of couples conducted by the Diocesan Development Program for Natural Family Planning. Ten percent of this group, which was significantly above average in motivation, instruction, and socio-economic indicators, reported "unintended pregnancies" within the year preceding the survey. The USCC announcement empasized that "this is less than the average of 16.1 percent failure rate for women using all methods of periodic abstinence reported in the most current research literature."

These figures may not be more decisive than Dr. Billings's, but they do show a higher pregnancy rate among NFP couples than she cites. Since natural family techniques are clearly of value to many couples in the first and third worlds and among Catholics as well as non-Catholics, proponents of these techniques would do well for their long-term credibility to be honest in their claims. We would have more confidence in Dr. Billings's statements if she acknowledged the complexities, uncertainties, and diversity of conclusions in this area.

But what does any of this have to do with the essential moral question? Even were it true that one form of contraception is better—more effective at preventing pregnancies, less harmful to the body, or through its "gentle discipline" more supportive of marital fidelity and women's status—does that make other forms of contraception sinful? Because all kinds of tragedies, physical and moral, might never have occurred were it not for the forms of contraception Dr. Billings condemns, does that mean they are against God's law? The same might be said of the automobile.



"Well I can see that you've given this a lot of thought..."

It turns out, of course, that Dr. Billings does not rest her case on these putative consequences but on her belief, expounded in the second half of the letter, that *Humanae vitae* contains definitive or infallible teaching.

A small number of theologians have argued that *Humanae vitae* contains infallible teaching; the vast majority disagree. Dr. Billings cites neither. Instead, she deals with the question simply by conflating it with the general mandate of the church to protect and proclaim God's plan for human love and life. But belief in that mandate does not preclude the recognition that the church has sometimes erred in carrying it out. The guidance of the Spirit in general does not extend to every particular. Indeed genuine faithfulness to this mandate requires a sensitivity to the possibility of error.

To hold that position, as most Catholic thinkers and teachers do, reduces the dangers of perpetuating cruel or unnecessary beliefs in the name of Christianity, as has too often happened. At the same time, it obviously opens the door to other dangers. Nonetheless, does Dr. Billings really want to suggest that such an understanding of the church's mandate automatically condemns its many adherents to rejecting such doctrines as the incarnation, the resurrection, and the Eucharist?

Likewise, Dr. Billings misunderstands—and leaves unanswered—Robert Hoyt's point ("How Odd of God," July 15, 1988), which was not particularly to advocate changes in moral codes but to register the fact that such changes do occur and that even papal statements get around to sanctioning them.

There is one sentence in Dr. Billings's letter that gets to the point: "The desire to eliminate the reproductive outcome of the act of intercourse is to separate oneself from the Creator's plan." That is the large claim at the heart of her argument, and the one found unpersuasive by many thoughtful people, not just those deficient in common sense, desperate to solve problems, or longing for sexual freedom. It is not a self-evident claim. It needs to be strongly supported by Scripture or tradition or moral philosophy. Dr. Billings offers no such support. THE EDITORS

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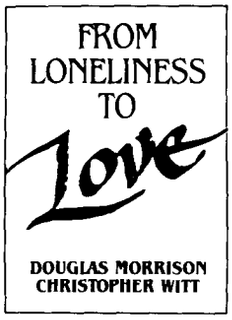

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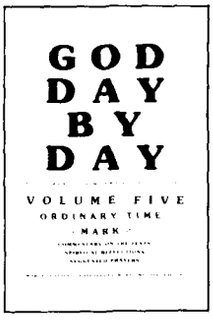

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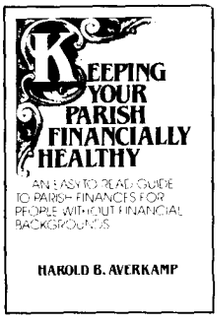

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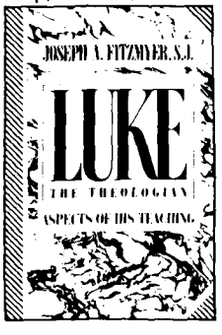

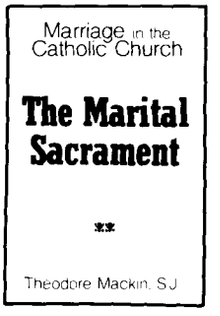

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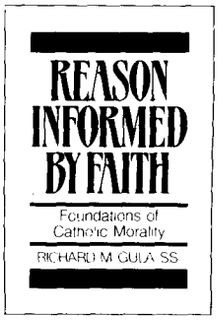

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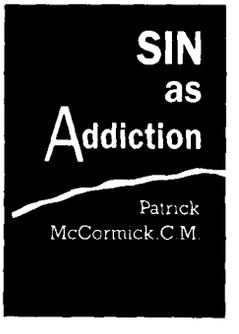

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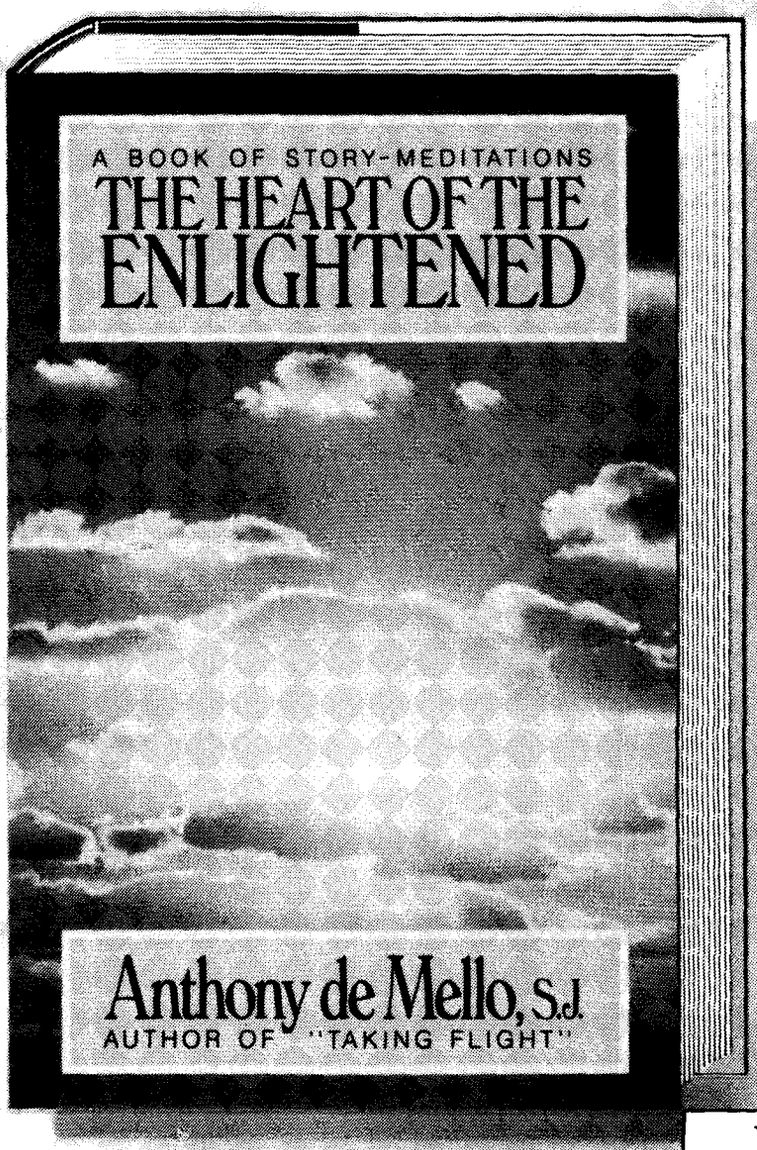

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